

EAST AFRICA FOOD CRISIS

Introduction

East Africa is in the midst of its worst food crisis for 20 years.¹ Across Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti, more than 12 million people are in need of food, drinking water and basic sanitation, as a result of a combination of drought, conflict, high food costs and systematic under-investment in pastoralist and marginalised communities.² Already, the crisis has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people.³

On August 11, the United Nations (UN) declared famine in five of southern Somalia's eight districts, with the risk that the rest will reach this level in the next four to six weeks.⁴ Thousands of Somalis are continuing to seek shelter, food and assistance at refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia, with a daily average in August of 1,386 new arrivals in Dadaab camp, in northeastern Kenya. Total refugee populations in Ethiopia and Kenya currently stand at 118,271 and 400,579 respectively.⁵

Critical aid is helping millions of vulnerable pastoralist and farming communities across Kenya and Ethiopia. Meanwhile, increased food and other assistance is being distributed to vulnerable communities inside Somalia by local organisations and some international agencies. But a funding gap of about US\$1bn remains for this work. The region continues to face serious risk of a humanitarian catastrophe.

The East Africa food crisis is affecting 12.4 million people. The following actions are needed to ensure both a swift and effective response, and a long-term solution to prevent the situation recurring:

- **The current emergency response must build on existing effective structures and efforts to help people's ability to earn a living and find enough to eat.**
- **Targeted support must be given to help pastoralist and marginalised**

communities in East Africa develop economically, and their national governments must become more accountable.

- **There must be greater investment in preparedness and resilience-building to prevent future emergencies, including famine.**
- **In Somalia, support for experienced local organisations in aid and drought management is key, while humanitarian aid must be increased and given without political constraints. A long-term solution to the conflict is required, and learning from peace-building and state development initiatives in Somaliland should be encouraged.**

Causes

The current crisis has been caused by a lethal combination of drought, high food and fuel prices, and – in the case of Somalia – conflict. A major factor is the under-investment in the economic development of pastoralist and small-holder farming communities in the arid and semi-arid lands of East Africa. Land tenure insecurity and arbitrary expropriation of pastoralist dry season grazing areas for large-scale agriculture has placed significant strain on land and water resources and contributed to increased land degradation.

While it is difficult to attribute specific weather conditions to climate change, there is also recognition that the climate in the region is becoming more severe and less predictable. Certainly, the current drought is considered in some parts to be the worst since records began in 1951, and this has made a difficult situation far worse.⁶

But another significant factor that cannot be ignored is the failure of national governments and international donors to respond adequately to early warnings such as those from the FEWS NET or to provide

sufficient funds for a UN appeal launched at the end of 2010.⁷ Original appeals for US\$800m to prevent the food crisis were only half met, and even now emergency appeals across Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia are only 48 per cent funded.⁸ If appropriate action had been taken in response to these early warnings then many lives and livelihoods would have been saved.

The food crisis and its underlying causes present immediate and long-term challenges for affected communities, national governments and the international community: including both ending the current crisis, and addressing the root causes to prevent future food emergencies. And these challenges must now be met.

Overcoming the crisis

Emergency aid is needed immediately and should support communities' recovery and resilience

Addressing the basic needs of vulnerable populations, including local communities and those in camps, by providing appropriate food, water and sanitation, is a priority.

The current emergency response must also build on effective existing structures and efforts by local communities themselves, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government bodies working with them, to secure enough food for themselves and earn a living in the future.

Where emergency support is needed for displaced and refugee communities, this should be provided rapidly, transparently and in a situation of security.

- **The funding gap of US\$1.29bn to meet humanitarian needs, as indicated by the UN figures from 9 August, must be met.⁹**
- **Donors must work with the UN to ensure that key services such as water and sanitation, reception facilities at camps and primary healthcare are funded alongside food aid.**
- **Humanitarian aid must be given freely according to need, rather than being politicised by any government or group, while humanitarian access must be prioritised and assured by all regional actors.**
- **Human rights must be upheld and monitored throughout the affected areas, and the safety and security of vulnerable groups seeking**

humanitarian assistance and humanitarian workers providing aid must be protected. Accountability to all recipients of humanitarian aid must be a priority.

- **Humanitarian assistance should be provided in such a way that supports recovery and builds resilience.**

In the community

Required action to increase food availability

- **Grain reserves of regional governments must be distributed to vulnerable populations.**
- **Where markets exist, grants and guaranteed payments can be used to encourage traders to bring food into areas short of food.**
- **Voucher or cash systems should be used to provide food to groups that need it.**
- **Import taxes and restrictions on trading food across borders must be temporarily removed.¹⁰**

Humanitarian aid that protects people's way of life and builds on community coordination

Assistance must be provided to protect vulnerable groups affected by the drought in a way that builds on community ways of life, ongoing training and existing resilience building efforts.

Through work with local organisations, provisions are being made to ensure access to clean water by drilling new and repairing existing boreholes or transporting water by truck to affected communities.

In pastoralist communities in northern Kenya, where livestock are dying or have lost their value significantly, aid can support supplementary feeding of cattle, or through the purchasing of these animals at a reasonable price.

Preparation for the next rainy season must include pre-positioning of important agricultural elements, such as seeds, and ensuring core breeding stock is available and shared strategically to facilitate rapid recovery of livestock levels.

Insuring against flood and disease

The first rains in East Africa are due in September and with them comes a significant risk of flash floods and disease. Indeed, there have already been reports of flash-flooding in Ethiopia.¹¹ Assistance to local communities must include establishing risk reduction measures to mitigate the

worst impact of flooding during rain.

Appropriate healthcare provision is also required to reduce the risk of disease. Likewise, livestock weakened by the drought are especially vulnerable to disease at this point, so timely provision of veterinary care is essential to reduce livestock mortality.

In refugee camps

Critical support needed for refugee and displaced communities

Dadaab camp and refugee camps in and around the town of Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, are now experiencing a significant increase in numbers as a result of the current drought and conflict in Somalia.

Adequate provision of reception facilities at refugee camps is essential to ensure that new arrivals receive emergency food, healthcare and information on their rights.

Once refugees have arrived, the formal registration process begins, which will enable them to access ongoing support at the camps. But arrival numbers are overwhelming resources; in Dadaab, about 30,000 of those seeking refuge are still awaiting formal registration by the Kenyan government.

Funding must ensure provision for refugees' immediate needs such as food, water, healthcare and shelter, as well as vital longer-term requirements, including education, training for work and psychosocial support.

The influx of newcomers has raised health concerns because of the added strain on limited healthcare resources, particularly as many new arrivals have not been vaccinated for contagious diseases. Refugees, who are often weak and malnourished, are at particular risk of disease. In Ethiopia, government and health agencies have begun vaccination against measles and polio of all refugee children between the ages of six months and 15 years being transferred from the transit centre.¹² But it is key that additional healthcare provision is prioritised and all new arrivals are vaccinated to prevent outbreaks.

The environmental impact of large numbers of displaced people can be significant, but this can be mitigated if communities are provided with cooking fuel and fuel-efficient stoves, which reduce the need for firewood. A recent report by the Women's Refugee Commission highlights that such provisions could increase safety for women, who are vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse

while collecting firewood. Reducing the time spent collecting firewood and cooking also means that women have more time to participate in camp activities and decision-making.¹³

Safety and security throughout the camps is vital, and providing information on how the camps are run and on the rights of the refugees is essential for preventing confusion or abuse of new arrivals. Systems for accountability within the camp, including mechanisms to complain about poor treatment, must be prioritised and adequately funded as part of the camp infrastructure.

Work by Christian Aid partner the Lutheran World Federation in Dadaab to improve the reception for new arrivals and strengthen accountability efforts is improving the situation, but continuing high level of arrivals are overwhelming resources and capacity.

Key requirements

- Adequate funds by donors and government must be provided to meet immediate and longer-term needs of refugees in a timely manner.
- Continued efforts must be made to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations within Somalia.
- To help ensure that Somali asylum seekers can travel safely from the border to the camps and be registered for refugee assistance as quickly as possible, the Kenyan authorities should reopen the screening centre in the town of Liboi on the Kenya-Somalia border.
- Support to meet the increased need for shelter and assistance throughout the refugee camps must be provided swiftly and sensitively. This should include building camp extensions where necessary, while simultaneously supporting the needs of local communities.
- Monitoring of human rights violations or violence against displaced populations by any actors – including armed groups, military, police or civilians – must be prioritised and investigations pursued, including where police or military officials are accused.

Humanitarian aid in Somalia

The situation in Somalia – where communities already vulnerable because of the ongoing conflict have been devastated by drought – remains dire. While all of southern Somalia is in acute humanitarian

crisis, Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Bakool, and those areas of Mogadishu with camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) are experiencing famine conditions.

Aid agencies are trying to deliver assistance to growing numbers of affected IDPs, but lack basic necessities to cover their immediate needs. Approximately 1.46 million people are displaced within Somalia – Mogadishu, which already hosted 370,000 IDPs, now has an additional 100,000, who moved into the city within the last two months.¹⁴

While humanitarian access remains restricted, essential work is going on through local and a few international organisations that have been working in Somalia for many years. These organisations, which understand the local situation and are trusted by communities, have a track record of delivering essential aid to those most in need. Humanitarian aid must reinforce these existing organisations, rather than overwhelm or undermine their work, or create new and unsustainable structures.

In the past, international military intervention has been used in efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, but it is clear that this is not the answer here. Instead, the focus should be on increasing and improving delivery of assistance and strengthening local structures, organisations and community leaders to provide support in an accountable way.

Never again? Addressing the underlying causes

National governments and international donors must provide targeted support for the economic development of pastoralist and marginalised communities

It has been widely recognised that a significant contributing factor to the recurrent food crises in the East and Horn of Africa is the failure of governments to invest adequately in pastoralist communities and small-holder farming.¹⁵

The marginalisation of such communities by national authorities and their economic policies over the years has contributed to the vulnerability of these communities in the current food crisis.

While this may not be surprising in Somalia, where armed violence and civil war have

plagued the country for more than 20 years, such under-investment is also the case in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Meanwhile, social, economic and environmental changes in the region during the last few decades have disrupted traditional ways pastoralists used to cope with droughts for centuries.

In Somalia, disruption has been caused by the long-running conflict that has also resulted in the failure of governance. In Kenya and Ethiopia, problems have been created by the leasing of traditional rangelands – to which pastoralists used to move their animals during drought periods – for large-scale irrigated farming and agricultural development. Evidence has shown that pastoralism is more viable in these zones than irrigated farming, and is already a major contributor to national economic development.¹⁶ In Ethiopia, for example, livestock exports are second only to coffee in importance to the economy.¹⁷ Nevertheless, access by pastoralist communities to rangelands and water sources has been reduced, leaving them more vulnerable when the worst droughts come.

Preventing future food crises requires governments and donors to invest in the policies and infrastructure that pastoralists need for their livelihoods, and to support and invest in the capacity building and coordination of communities and civil society.

This includes, for example:

- investment in rangeland management through land-use planning that reflects the priorities of pastoralists, their community structures and organisations
- protection of pastoralist land rights (including informal communal land tenure systems), particularly those areas relied upon during drought intervals
- long-term planning for strategic water reservoirs and water management
- investment in infrastructure that strengthens pastoralist access to markets for their livestock; the reduction in internal livestock tariffs and trade barriers that could impede viable trade; and the development of pastoralist-led livestock marketing businesses and veterinary services to ensure pastoralists make more money from smaller herds
- development and support for agriculture practices that do not

require rain, and other livelihood-diversification options chosen by pastoralists

- investment in improving local communities' understanding of gender equality and how it can help them be more resilient, and then support to help them address inequalities
- systematic investment in the capacity building of pastoralist community organisations to help them influence government decision-making and to improve their technical expertise, especially in terms of access to climate information and implementation of resilient livelihood planning and drought cycle management. In Kenya, this key area of work can be strengthened through the opportunities provided for greater decentralisation under the new constitution.

Greater investment in drought cycle management to build preparedness and resilience to regular drought

Drought cycle management aims to strengthen people's livelihoods throughout all stages of the drought cycle to ensure they are better prepared, quicker to respond and less vulnerable to drought. Investment in these techniques is an important part of building resilience in communities, alongside the government policies and economic investment in infrastructure needed to support the pastoralist and marginalised communities. In Somalia this must happen alongside community-led peace-building initiatives.

Training communities in drought cycle management can support preparedness by conceptualising drought as a cycle of four warning phases: normal, alert, emergency and recovery. Advantages of this approach include improving the timeliness, appropriateness and, ultimately, the effectiveness of work by ensuring that activities are matched to the current stage of the drought cycle.

Activities to be supported as part of a drought cycle management process include:

- **rainwater harvesting techniques** – such as building sand dams and capturing roof run-off – to store water to be used during a drought
- **strategic stockpiling of cereals and grains to feed people during food shortages**
- **improving shallow wells, rock catchment and earth dam**

- **dry-land farming techniques, including those to store local hay provisions**
- **strengthening community organisation and coordination in preparing for drought**
- **facilitating livestock sales before their body condition and market prices both decline**
- **restocking in recovery periods, but identifying breeds or crop varieties that are adapted to increase volatility and uncertainty of weather patterns**
- **improving access to markets and to financial services, such as savings, credit and insurance, that would offer some social protection during difficult periods**
- **cash or social transfer programmes that provide support on condition of education or other poverty reduction efforts that continue until other income sources are established**
- **training of local communities in drought cycle management, including the above strategies, so that they can implement them independently**
- **efforts to improve gender equality and help communities become more resilient.**

Learning lessons on peace in Somalia

In parts of southern Somalia the most significant factor aggravating the food crisis is conflict. Communities there need the same kind of drought cycle management and support for pastoralist and small-holder farmers needed elsewhere, but the violence, insecurity and lack of government make this almost impossible.

A recent report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) on good practice for humanitarians in complex security environments underlines the importance of dialogue. It also recognises that the acceptance of humanitarian action by local authorities and communities needs to be approached as a process rather than as an event, requiring presence, time and sustained engagement with relevant parties.¹⁸ A key finding of the report is that, 'the greater an organisation's demonstrated capacity to communicate and negotiate with all relevant actors, the better access and security is achieved for humanitarian operations'.¹⁹

Lessons that have emerged in Somaliland and Puntland, where peacebuilding processes come from the local level, bottom up, rather than being imposed using external

military force, provide some interesting insights. Work by research NGO Conciliation Resources highlights the failure of external peace processes imposed from above and instead looks to lessons from northern Somalia, including work by peacebuilding NGO Interpeace in Somaliland.²⁰ In addition, lessons learnt from UN work to facilitate lasting peace and transition to sustainable governance in Bosnia and East Timor could also be shared as part of a community-led peace process.²¹

Meanwhile, the international community must support efforts to ensure all actors in the conflict adhere to human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL), including the Transitional Federal Government (TFG); Al-Shabaab, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a, Ras Kamboni and other militia groups; and African Union Forces in Somalia (AMISOM). Investment must be made in

the independent and transparent monitoring and reporting of human rights and IHL violations.

The support by the international community and donors to the TFG and AMISOM places greater responsibility on them to play an active role in improving the conduct of the TFG and its allied forces. A recent report by Human Rights Watch calls on UN and major donors to ensure that where the TFG and allied forces take over areas previously occupied by Al-Shabaab they need to press for respect for basic human rights and closely monitor the support they provide on this basis.²²

For more information please contact:

Katherine Nightingale, Senior Advocacy and Policy Officer – Humanitarian, knightingale@christian-aid.org

Endnotes

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**Christian Aid, 35 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL
t. 020 7620 4444 christianaid.org.uk**