

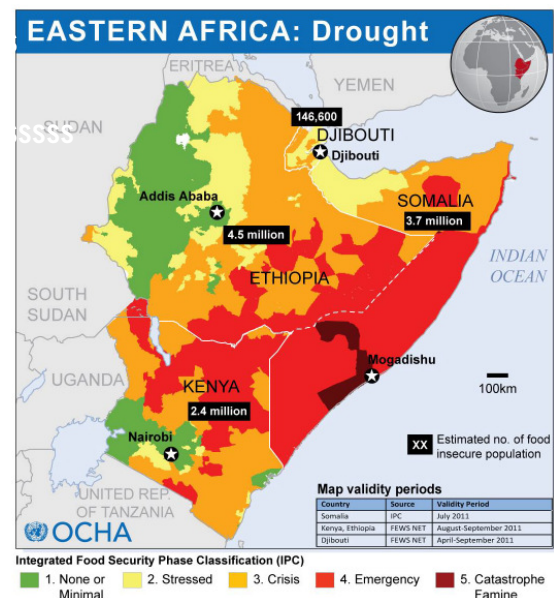
LAST STOP REFUGEE CAMP? HUNGER IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

No. 22 / August 2011

Overview

Currently, at least 12.4 million people are threatened by an acute food crisis in the Horn of Africa. In almost all regions of southern Somalia, more than 38 percent of the population is undernourished. According to the United Nations' World Food Programme, in that area alone 5,000 to 10,000 people could die of hunger during the month of August. Over the next few weeks, this number could increase to several hundred thousand. Approximately a quarter of the Somali population has migrated within the country – mostly to the capital of Mogadishu – or to one of the hopelessly overcrowded refugee camps in Ethiopia or Kenya. At the same time, the percentage of undernourished people is also increasing in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. In parts of Kenya, every fifth child is now undernourished, while in Ethiopia – which ever since the terrible famine of the 1980s has tried to shed its image as a hunger-plagued land country – 4.8 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance. How did this situation arise? Did the existing early-warning systems fail? Who is responsible for this catastrophe? And what can be done about it? In the following paragraphs, we attempt to answer these questions.

For many weeks, we have been witness to shocking images from the Horn of Africa: long lines of exhausted, emaciated people waiting to be registered at one of the refugee camps in Kenya or Ethiopia. Dusty, formerly white tents, their canvases fluttering in the desert wind. Children who are too weak to move. Outside the camps, withered landscapes and dead livestock. The crisis has affected the rural population the most, especially small-scale farmers. They have had to set aside their traditional survival strategies and resort to extreme methods in order to deal with the catastrophe. They are leaving their home regions, their families, houses and villages, letting their fields and pastures lie fallow; they have been forced to sell their livestock and other goods at considerably less than their value. Their only recourse is to seek shelter in a refugee camp and avail themselves of food aid, thus destroying their chances to live independently for a long period of time.



Source: UN OCHA

Is climate change behind it?

The most obvious and frequently cited causes of the acute situation are the many years of weak rainfall or even of no rainfall in many East African countries. According to numbers of climate experts, the phenomenon “La Niña” is responsible for the drought. “La Niña” usually appears in connection with the better-known “El Niño.” Through the effects of winds and ocean currents, the water in the eastern Pacific cools while that in the western Pacific warms up. The results are not just extreme precipitation in Asia, Australia and South America, as was the case last year in Pakistan or this year in Australia, but also higher temperatures and lack of rainfall along the eastern coast of Africa.

Early warning without a reaction

For quite some time, there have been clear indications that this catastrophe was looming – and that it could end up being one of the worst famines in several decades. As early as November 2010, a warning was issued by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), which the American development agency USAID established during the great famine in Ethiopia of the early 1980s. In addition, after the low precipitation during last autumn’s so-called rainy season, the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned about the threatening crisis. With the latter in mind, the FAO forecast that every dollar invested early enough in agriculture could save ten dollars in eventual humanitarian assistance.¹ Yet there was very little action. Investments in preventive measures, although so much cleverer from a policy standpoint, are still not a matter of course. This is true not only when it comes to natural catastrophes but also in the case of armed conflicts, climate change and other predictable extreme events. Only very late, after a BBC report about the refugee camp Dadaab in Kenya roused the world community, was financial assistance offered to the affected population. Yet of the approximately \$2.5 billion that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimated would be needed to address the crisis, only half has been financed so far. As a so-called “slow-onset disaster” – a catastrophe that develops gradually – the drought received less attention than disasters like a flood or an earthquake, which occur suddenly.

It is not entirely clear as to whether the phenomenon “La Niña” is strengthened by climate change or not. Yet according to estimates by the Leibnitz Institute for Marine Sciences, it is altogether possible that the coming together of “La Niña” and water temperatures that have been increased by several tenths of a degree by climate change could magnify extreme weather-related events. Hence the drought catastrophe is also often represented as a consequence of climate change.

Rising food prices and loss of purchasing power

The drought has caused significant crop losses in the affected areas, resulting in rising prices for food staples. In some regions of Somalia, according to FEWS NET, the price of grain has risen more than 350 percent since last year. Together with the increased food prices on the world market, this has set in motion a fatal vicious circle: In order to afford food, many farmers must sell their already-weakened livestock. Because of their bad condition as well as the current oversupply of animals, the farmers can only make a fraction of the original profit. Their purchasing power sinks. The result is that the population can no longer afford many foodstuffs. On its own, this mechanism did not have to lead to catastrophe. Normally, high prices can be offset through trade and imports or by government-controlled strategic food reserves being brought on the market. But the drought comes just as the prices for food on the world market also have risen dramatically. Between June 2010 and May 2011, the prices for some types of grain nearly doubled. One of the reasons, aside from crop losses in 2010 (particularly in Russia) and restrictive export politics in important agricultural exporting countries, is the increased production of bio-fuels as well as heightened stock-market speculation on food commodities. Hence, it is scarcely possible to compensate for the increased food prices on the Horn of Africa through food imports. In addition, the strategic food reserves of the affected countries – if they even exist – are already used up. The Ethiopian government, for example, brought them on the market in the spring, in order to prevent the protests then taking place in North Africa from “overflowing” into Ethiopia. Demonstrations had already taken place over the increased food prices.

The crisis is also homemade

It would be a mistake to seek the causes for the crisis in external factors alone. The famine in the Horn of Africa is in large part homemade. For decades, there has been no functioning Somali regime that could concern itself with

the safety and well being of its citizens. On the face of it, the clans that rule individual parts of the country could take over isolated governmental functions. Faced by the famine, however, they have shown themselves to be largely helpless. The power struggles that keep on flaring up, for example between the al-Shabab militia and the government, not only hinder an effective political response to the crisis but make it much more difficult to distribute humanitarian relief in the affected regions. In particular, the early refusal of al-Shabab to allow foreign aid organizations into the areas it controlled made it well nigh impossible to provide supplies to the population. Now that al-Shabab has retreated from Mogadishu, there is finally a chance to create a safe haven for Somali refugees.

In the WorldRiskIndex of the alliance Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft (comprising the five German relief agencies Welthungerhilfe, Brot für die Welt, Misereor, terre des hommes and Medico International), Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti are ranked as vulnerable or very vulnerable. In other words, their societies are considered to be very susceptible to extreme natural events and at the same time their capacities to cope with and adapt to such events are considered to be very limited. All three countries have a low per capita income, and all three societies are marked by a high degree of social inequality and broadly marginalized population strata. The public infrastructure is insufficiently developed, especially in rural areas; medical care is poor and illiteracy high. Much of the responsibility for this situation lies with the countries' bad political leadership. Kenya, for example, is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which lists a total of 178 countries, Kenya is ranked 154, while Ethiopia occupies the 116th position. Despite extensive growth rates in some areas of the Ethiopian economy, many parts of the population have profited little.

Selling off of land

As a solution to the chronically poor state of nutrition in recent years, both Ethiopia and Kenya have invested in the development of agriculture, considerably increasing yields. Yet most of the investments have gone to the development of high-yield areas. The populations in other parts of the country have been neglected and increasingly pushed to the margins of society. Another important factor contributing to this unfortunate development has been the sale of land to foreign investors. Both Ethiopia and Kenya have sold large parcels of land to

agricultural companies from India, China, Saudi Arabia and the United States, which use the land mostly to cultivate plants for energy production and food exports. Because of vaguely worded land titles, small farmers in particular have lost their areas for cultivation in such "land-grabbing" actions. The jobs that were often promised by the investors either never materialized or provided only a few farmers with a source of income.

Little steps in the right direction

Yet along with all the failures, there have been some small successes. Both Kenya and Ethiopia maintain emergency hunger programs, which not only distribute food but also provide seeds for small farmers. Kenya also has a school meal program that ensures that children in drought areas get at least one meal per day. It is also true that, over the last few years, there has been a large increase in at least part of the population's access to water in both Kenya and Ethiopia. For example, Welthungerhilfe alone has built more than 350 water-supply systems in Kenya during the past three years, from which approximately 310,000 people now benefit. Numerous projects to support small-scale farming have also borne fruit. Farmers can hold their own better than before against the continually recurring droughts. Another success resulted from programmes encouraging nomads to settle down. In recent years, many nomads have become at least partially sedentary, which allows them better access to educational and health-care facilities and thus an improved ability to assess and adjust to events. Although these represent only small steps in the right direction, they have contributed to the fact that fewer people have fallen victim to the catastrophe in Kenya and Ethiopia than in previous comparable catastrophes.

Key requirements

The complexity of the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa calls for a variety of responses. According to Welthungerhilfe, the following requirements are especially key:

1. More financial resources to provide immediate assistance

According to the UN, ca. \$2.5 billion will be necessary to save the people of East Africa from famine; up to now, only half of that has been provided. The promise of the German government to provide in addition to the already pledged 33, 5 million another 118 million Euro for the crisis is an important step. Finally, the German pledge has reached a level that is adequate both in terms of the severity of

the disaster and in terms of Germany's economic strength. Now, the German Government must keep its promises and make sure that the emergency assistance reaches the beneficiaries quickly. Furthermore, the German government should increase the transparency of the funds already allocated, and differentiate in their communication between "old," previously promised funds and "new" funds for the Horn of Africa. Given the fact that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have direct access to the population, because they work together with local partner organizations in the communities and villages, a substantial share of funds should be channeled through NGOs. At the international donors' conference in Addis Ababa on August 25, the international donor community must close the remaining funding gap.

2. Security for Somalia

The extent of the famine in the Horn of Africa depends largely on the civil war in Somalia. A long-term strategy for combating nutritional insecurity in the area can only be implemented when Somalia becomes politically stable. The famine has changed the political situation in Somalia significantly. The al-Shabab militia suffered a crucial loss of legitimacy that forced them to retreat from Mogadishu. This might have opened a window of opportunity for a political solution to the conflict. In its support of the regional mediation efforts by the African Union, the German government should rely on tools of civil conflict transformation. The successful management of the conflict in the Horn of Africa however, will require a significantly higher financial commitment to civil crisis prevention and conflict transformation than has hitherto been made. In order for that to happen, Germans in general must better recognize the importance of civil-crisis prevention.

3. Create perspectives for the refugees

The refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia are not temporary facilities. Due to the lack of other prospects, refugees will remain there for years. It is therefore urgent to increase the capacity of these camps to accommodate all the refugees over the long-term. In addition, measures must also be taken to support their self-sufficiency. The governments of Kenya and Ethiopia must not only provide support in coping with flood of refugees. They also must be asked to give those refugees who cannot return to Somalia for the foreseeable future an opportunity to earn a living and provide for themselves. To that end, however, the refugees need access to land and the right to work.

4. Combining short-term help with long-term investments in agriculture

The crisis in the Horn of Africa is a chronic one. Hence there is an urgent need for emergency-relief assistance to be linked to long-term measures, in order to ensure an adjustment to climate change through protection of resources and new farming methods. Support should not subside after the acute crisis has been addressed. About 80 percent of the population in the Horn of Africa live from agriculture. In agriculture, then, lies the key to the establishment of nutritional security, and supporting agriculture must be a greater priority. In so doing, it is absolutely necessary to invest not just in high-yield areas but to decentralize food production and again make small farmers from rural areas the focal point of any assistance. Long in advance, these farmers must be prepared for periods of drought by, for instance, introducing drought-resistant types of grain, teaching methods to catch and store rainwater and establishing community-based early-warning systems. In addition, public agricultural research must receive more financing.

5. Preventing "land grabbing"

The current major interest of countries and companies to invest heavily in agriculture should not lead to the selling off of land and to discrimination against the local population. Instead of supporting the "land grabbing" of agricultural concerns, the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia should use the favourable investment climate to implement a new and above all sustainable agrarian policy. They should ensure that investment projects are planned and realized on the basis of social, ecological but also economic impact analyses. Following the principle of a "prior, free and informed consent," the analyses should be carried out with the participation of the people concerned (farmers' organizations, indigenous groups, etc.).

6. Fight the causes of extreme food-price fluctuations

One of the central causes of famine in the Horn of Africa is high food prices, and among the most important factors driving up those prices worldwide are capital investments on the commodities markets, the increasing production of bio-fuels from agricultural raw materials and export restrictions imposed by the agricultural exporting countries. In addition, there are the high post-harvest losses and lack of storage in the affected countries. In order to curb the negative impact of biofuel production, subsidies must be reduced significantly in this area. The biofuel mandates adopted by many coun-

tries should be abolished or at least be handled flexibly, in a negative correlation to gaps between supply and demand. The German government must use its political influence to contain price-inflating investments in food markets. The activities of both financial market players from outside the industry and speculative investors in the food market must be monitored following a set of internationally binding rules. Among these should be the implementation of strict reporting requirements as well as the introduction of both quantity and price controls. In this way, a speculation-inhibiting deceleration of the financial markets could be achieved.¹

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¹ Compare with IN BRIEF No. 20 Financial Speculations Increases Hunger,
http://www.welthungerhilfe.de/fileadmin/media/pdf/Brennpunkte/IN_BRIEF_20_Food_Speculation.pdf