

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

One year on from UN declaration of famine, Somalia faces worsening food crisis

In 2011 the world waited for the UN to declare famine before providing assistance on the level needed to save lives in Somalia – this delayed response wasted lives and money. We are now seeing warnings of Somalia slipping back into crisis and cannot afford to make the same mistake again – we should respond now, and in force, in ways that make people better able to withstand the next disaster to strike.

OXFAM CALLS FOR...

Donor governments to:

- Act on the early warnings we are now receiving. We must learn from the mistakes of last year and react immediately and not wait for extreme crisis to hit.
- Ensure that with all the competing priorities the severe food crisis in Somalia and the risk of it worsening does not fall off the agenda.
- To meet minimum requirements for funding, including supporting the UN's consolidated appeal for Somalia, which is only at \$579m from an appeal for over \$1bn.
- Ensure that new funds and mechanisms currently being proposed to help Somali people are designed to support the link between relief, rehabilitation and development based on needs.
- Make good on their stated belief in bottom up peace processes for Somalia and allow Somali people to shape their own future.

Agencies delivering programmes in Somalia to:

- Scale up their response in the areas that have been identified by the early warnings. This applies to all types of aid agencies, be they UN or international, regional or local NGOs.
- Take action to make stronger connections between emergency response and efforts to build people's resilience to crisis.
- Support Somali communities to pursue peace building efforts based on their own priorities and timescales to support genuine and sustainable moves away from the endless cycle of conflict.

THE SITUATION NOW

Last year, after the UN famine declaration in Somalia (20 July 2011), a huge international response from the Somali Diaspora, governments from around the world, and NGOs from Somalia and beyond came together to save thousands of lives. Much was achieved based on the generosity of institutions and individuals. However, Somali people faced such a steep challenge last year that it was always going to take a long time to fully recover. With ongoing conflicts and failed rains, Somalia is now slipping back into crisis.

Some 2.5 million people across Somalia are still in crisis and a further 1.3 million could fall back into crisis. Close to a million people have been forced from their homes and are living in camps across Somalia while more than a million Somali people have sought refuge abroad. Food stocks are running low and Somalis face another emergency situation over the horizon.

FEWSNET and FSNAU (the most respected forecasters of food availability) predict that many communities will see the limited improvements of the last few months wiped out as the hungry season stretches into August or beyond.¹ The most recent rains came late and were well below average (in some areas as much as 80 per cent less than a 'normal' year). On top of the recent poor rains, people across Bay and in many parts of Gedo, Hiiraan, Bakool, and Middle Juba have suffered cricket and grasshopper attacks, which have destroyed their crops. Coastal areas of Somaliland, especially Awdal, Salal and Eastern Sanag have received little to no rainfall, creating serious challenges for pastoralist communities and IDPs.

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For families who had yet to recover from the ravages of last year and who even in good years are living so close to crisis, this could prove catastrophic – for many people in Somalia there is little or no resilience to deal with shocks like failed rains or conflict. Somalia is not an easy environment to deliver aid, but even with these challenges it is possible to provide life saving assistance, as Oxfam and others have been doing, but we can do more to help people withstand future shocks. For example Oxfam's partners in tandem with emergency relief programmes have been rehabilitating water catchment facilities in Galgaduud, Hiran, Lower and Middle Shabelle, Gedo and Lower and Middle Juba regions of South-Central Somalia.

FEWSNET expect that in South and Central Somalia 'the food security situation of poor, agropastorlist households is likely to deteriorate to Emergency levels (IPC Phase 4) starting in June.' Phase 4 is the most serious level that food insecurity can reach before communities tip into being classified as 'in famine'.

Because there is a time lag between initial warnings and detailed understanding of the actual impact, the humanitarian community does not yet have reliable statistics to establish how communities have been affected. Anecdotal evidence from our partners in the field points to the accuracy of this prediction. We need to act now when we have warnings in place rather than waiting for certainty.

In parts of Somalia the rains have been sufficient and the outlook is slightly better, but because of ongoing conflicts and the difficulty of transportation around the country, it is hard for food in areas of surplus to reach people in need. And at times there have also been avoidable hold ups and inefficiencies in supply lines for aid delivery.

Somalia's crisis has knock-on effects not just in Africa; the ongoing conflict is impacting on an already desperate Yemen where half the population are food insecure and in need of assistance. In the past six months alone, 56,146 refugees have arrived in Yemen, many of whom originate from Somalia.² Around 20 per cent of the almost 1 million Somali refugees are in Yemen, and the vast majority of UNHCR registered refugees in Yemen are Somali.³

Despite the huge attention focused on the plight of Somali people a year ago, the UN appeal for Somalia for 2012 is now, over 6 months since being launched, less than 50 per cent funded⁴ (other sources of funding are available such as from the OIC, or bilaterally from donors, but the UN appeal remains the main vehicle for emergency relief). As a result, Somali people are unable to receive the help they need to get their lives back on track.

Oxfam and other agencies are carrying out emergency assessments to establish the full extent of peoples' needs and put in place a response plan based on this. Our existing programmes continue to help over one million people across Somalia and we stand ready to expand our assistance.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It is legitimate to ask why, one year on from one of the largest humanitarian responses ever, we are again facing a crisis in Somalia. Poor rains are the immediate answer, as Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa suffer from increasingly erratic rainfall. But other countries are better able to deal with similar problems; the real causes of Somalia's recurring crises are caused by people.

What sets Somalia apart from other countries are ongoing armed conflicts, fought by multiple groups and featuring shifting alliances that have drawn in neighbours and the international community, and, for almost three decades these conflicts have defied efforts to be brought to an end. Ongoing fighting and insecurity mean that people's ability to plan for the future and invest to help them withstand future droughts is seriously undermined. **Building consensus around allowing Somali communities to pursue peace building efforts based on their own priorities and timescales is vital if we are to see genuine and sustainable moves away from the endless cycle of conflict.**

Likewise while the world has been quick to respond to emotive images in the media, it has been harder to build a consensus around the measures needed to help people withstand the effects of failed rains or ongoing conflict. Agencies have been calling for longer term measures to help communities address systemic vulnerability to climatic shocks. For

example, Oxfam and others provided seeds for planting alongside emergency relief during last year's emergency; this allowed farmers to return home and begin replanting their crops, reducing the time they spent dependent on assistance. But **too often there is still only minimal connection between emergency response and efforts to build people's resilience to crisis – donors and implementing agencies share responsibility for this shortcoming.**

The aid architecture for Somalia is such that it permits only short term gains but does not allow for communities to become resilient to future recurrent shocks, such as droughts and floods. Whilst donors must continue to support humanitarian assistance projects, without longer term flexible funding and assistance aimed at looking beyond saving lives to building resilience (as has been recognised in the UN's 2012 Somalia consolidated appeal), there is a risk that Somalis will remain constantly vulnerable to being one poor harvest away from crisis.

Many families in Somalia are never more than one or two poor rains away from disaster. In 2011, there had been two years of above average rains and harvest. However, after just two failed rains, much of Southern Somalia was plunged into a crisis that the UN declared famine. Even in good years, Somalia is heavily reliant on food imports to meet peoples' basic needs and is therefore very vulnerable to even small disruptions to food supply. The good Deyr rains in 2011 produced a bumper crop but household reserves built from that have been largely exhausted since April this year.

Unless we work to build the strength of communities and individuals to withstand poor rains and work toward genuinely inclusive and durable peace in Somalia we should expect recurrent crises such as the one we saw last year and may be witnessing again in 2012.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The world needs to respond to this emerging disaster and provide funds to meet the immediate needs of Somali people, but these should also look to the longer term: to ways to help people not only withstand this crisis but the next and the one after that. **The UN's consolidated appeal for Somalia is only at \$579m from an appeal for over \$1bn. Donors need to meet these minimum requirements for funding and aid agencies, whether from the UN, or NGOs, need to scale up their response in the areas that have been identified by the early warnings.** Those of us who respond to the needs of Somali people must do so in a way that builds the resilience of the people we seek to help and donors must support these initiatives. This is both morally right but also economically prudent – although hard to quantify exactly, there is strong evidence that spending to build resilience is far more cost effective than spending to respond to an emergency⁵.

It needs to become standard that emergency response includes elements that help people recover and re-establish their lives.

If we wait to respond to the multiple warnings that have been received, as happened last year, people will be forced to eat their seed stocks and breeding animals meaning the chances of facing the same problems again this year are high. There are many urgent issues demanding the attention of policy makers around the world, but we must not allow the humanitarian crisis in Somalia to fall off the global agenda.

We should be working together to make these kind of disasters a thing of the past in Somalia. That will only happen if we design a system of support that allows for the adaptability and farsightedness necessary for Somalia. For example cash for work programmes designed to help people in emergency situations can carry out activities such as tree planting and rangeland improvement that should help land to be productive even when rains are insufficient; the rehabilitation of canals provides short term jobs and long term irrigation for crops; training young people in skills that help them earn a decent living means they and their families are less likely to run short when prices rise; and sustainable provision of clean water and health mean stronger and healthier people less likely to suffer when food availability declines. Agencies have many times called for the **provision of predictable, flexible and long term funding** for these kinds of projects. Gradually, donors are beginning to heed this call (as evidenced by the strong resilience framing in the 2012 CAP) but it needs to become standard that emergency response includes elements that help people recover and re-establish their lives.

New funds and mechanisms currently being proposed to help Somali people could usefully be designed to support the link between relief, rehabilitation and development based on needs. These should not be used as means of conferring legitimacy on particular factions or advancing political or military objectives. Humanitarian assistance in Somalia must be impartial, Somali politics are fluid and fast moving and principled assistance (based on the needs of people and communities) and community ownership are the only ways to mitigate the risks inherent in such an environment.

Without resolution of Somalia's ongoing conflicts, efforts to help people withstand the harsh environment will only be able to do so much. International efforts to end the conflict though top down externally imposed solutions have failed again and again over the last two decades, while local efforts to resolve disputes and come to compromise have been successful in the north east and west of the country and also at times in the south.

The international community needs to make good on its stated belief in bottom up peace processes for Somalia and allow Somali people to shape their own future.

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NOTES

- ¹ FEWSNET, Somalia Food Security Alert, June 18 2012
http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/SO_alert_2012_06_final.pdf and FSNAU, Quarterly Brief, June 2012 <http://www.fsnau.org/products/quarterly-briefs>
- ² OCHA Humanitarian Update July 12 2012 Yemen:
<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20Yemen%20Humanitarian%20Bulletin%20%235%20-%202012%20July%202012.pdf>
- ³ Refugees and new arrivals statistical overview April 2012, UNHCR
<http://www.unhcr.org/4faa3a119.html>
- Somali refugees in the region as of June 14 2012: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ff5ad129.html>
- ⁴ See UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service (accessed 13 July 2012):
<http://fts.unocha.org/>
- ⁵ DFID 2012, The Economics of Early Response and Disaster Resilience: Lessons from Kenya and Ethiopia

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This paper was written by Roger Middleton. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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