



Drought in the Horn of Africa

Preventing the next disaster

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Executive summary

Averting future food crises

The Horn of Africa's most serious drought in decades has brought severe, and all too familiar, humanitarian consequences. Much of the suffering could have been avoided and in a region plagued by recurrent drought, the greatest challenge today is preventing the next disaster.

This report looks at the roots of the catastrophe – why a natural occurrence has devastated the lives of millions – and proposes ways to avert future crises when drought returns to the Horn, as it will with regularity. The answer, it says, lies not in emergency aid but in support for food security. Relief alone only deepens the danger.

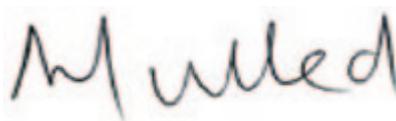
Red Cross and Red Crescent societies have been responding to drought for decades, and their networks of volunteers and immediate action have saved the lives of thousands of people. But, the IFRC argues, the way we invest must change: we must build community resilience and empower the people of arid lands to rise above the natural hazards that so frequently confront them. It is time for governments, donors and humanitarians to take an integrated, longer term approach and address the chronic underlying issues.

Examples from Kenya show how this approach can work. They have turned around the lives of pastoralists who cannot sustain old livelihoods, introduced sustainable farming, and removed a dependence on food aid. Although modest compared to the present scale of disaster, they show the way ahead and this work must expand with urgency if the harrowing images the world sees today are not to be repeated.

“It's time to change the way we invest.”



Bekele Geleta
Secretary
General, IFRC



Abbas Gullet
Secretary General,
Kenya Red Cross

Key messages

- Governments, donors and humanitarian organisations must work together on a long term approach, addressing the chronic underlying issues. Together, we need to focus on preventing future crises through intelligent investment in sustainable change.
- We must build the resilience of communities, empower people to identify their development priorities and diversify livelihood options. Smallholder farming provides one solution for struggling pastoralist communities and should be expanded.
- Donors already motivated to provide increased funding during times of heightened emergency must also be encouraged to look at investing to prevent the next disaster, as well as meeting emergency needs. Humanitarian aid and development must work hand in hand. Examples in this report show how their investment will lessen the need to fund expensive and unsustainable emergency responses in years to come.
- Communities should be protected from rising food prices that magnify the impact of drought. As set out in the 2011 World Disasters Report, new regulations must curb the ability of speculators to exert excessive market power over food.
- Disaster risk reduction in communities has to become a priority. Governments should increase their investment in community infrastructure and social services with a focus on education to ensure the next generation can live healthy, productive lives.

Horn of Africa drought – key facts and figures

- Drought in the Horn of Africa has affected over 13 million people, including 3.75 million Kenyans.
- The World Food Programme is currently able to assist only 7.4 million people (77 per cent of those it would like to help).
- Approximately one in three Somalis has been displaced due to the drought.
- Almost 3.7 million people in Somalia (close to half the population) are facing a humanitarian crisis.
- 1 in 3 children in southern Somalia is malnourished.
- Over \$1bn (US) has been committed to respond to the emergency but a further \$1bn is still needed to save thousands of lives.
- In the Dollo Ado refugee camps in Ethiopia, 50 per cent of children under five years old are acutely malnourished.
- According to the UN, unless operations are increased, 750,000 people are at risk of death in the next four months.
- The food aid coming to Somalia can only meet about 10 per cent of the country's needs.
- Over 30 per cent of people are malnourished in drought affected areas.

Nomadic people living in north-eastern Kenya have lost almost all their goats, cattle and camels as a result of the drought.



Introduction

The land is barren except for withered scrub. The soil is dust or hard as rock. Animals lie dead or dying. Despondent people look on, afraid with good cause that before too long many will join their livestock. Drought is strangling the Horn of Africa.

If years of recurrent drought have sucked the land bone dry, they have drained human hope in the process.

Such scenes are common across the Horn today but so they were in 2008 and 2009, in 2005 and 2006, in 2000 and 2001, and in the droughts of the 1990s. **The story does not change in essence.** Only the detail does, and the degree of deprivation as resolve and resources are exhausted.

What is happening now in the Horn – where the world’s worst food security crisis deepens – is a regular occurrence, and will emerge again in a couple of years, consuming life and livelihood, sapping what is left of people’s belief in themselves. Over the past two decades in particular the pattern has been unrelenting.

The humanitarian impacts

Today, 13.5 million people across Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti are suffering, and amid famine in Somalia around 3.2 million are feared to be on the brink of starvation.

Facing the greatest calamity due to drought combined with conflict, insecurity and state failure, Somalis have streamed into neighbouring countries – some 215,000 since the beginning of 2011, the United Nations says – and north-eastern Kenya’s Dadaab camps now house the greatest concentration of refugees in the world.

It is almost beyond comprehension that the refugees, and their appalling plight on which the eyes of the world are focussed, are just one part of a wider, much deeper, insidious and enduring crisis. As Dadaab struggled with an August count of 440,000 people, Kenya as a whole contained 3.7 million people in serious need of food and other assistance. Of those, around 1.4 million faced an emergency, no longer able to provide their basic needs, while another two million pastoralists and farmers were in crisis.

Not far from Dadaab, in a village where the wells had run dry, a despondent pastoralist said: “Once I had 500 cattle. Now what do I have? A family of 20 and nothing to feed them but the handouts we get every few months.” As the land dried up, farming families were migrating in search of water and sustenance, and the outlook offered no respite. The dry season had started two months early and would only intensify. **Food prices remained unremittingly high, conflict occurred where pastoralists competed for remaining water and depleted pasture, and disease was rampant among both livestock and humans.** With

“In two or three years there will be another drought. Again three or four million Kenyans could suffer. Again we will mobilize to save lives. But Kenya can, and should, be feeding itself. The disaster zone you see today could be a Kenyan bread basket. Enough of food aid. What we want is food security.”

**Abbas Gullet, Secretary General,
Kenya Red Cross Society**

sources dwindling, rural families were increasingly drinking untreated water from rivers, streams, polluted ponds and wells, risking waterborne disease such as typhoid and cholera.



The cycle of relief

Of course, across the Horn, relief has been forthcoming through emergency food, water and health interventions, such as those of the Kenya and Ethiopian Red Cross and the Somali and Djibouti Red Crescent. In the village near Dadaab, the Kenya Red Cross Society has been trucking in thousands of litres of water, as it has to hundreds of others in the region. Food distributions, school feeding programmes, community health support, and the rehabilitation of emergency boreholes all help to ease the suffering.

But relief, the Red Cross Red Crescent insists, is not the answer. The drought will return, again and again, and need will far outweigh the response capacity. **Funding for humanitarian aid already fails to keep pace with what is required for ever-increasing disaster.** On their own, indeed, short-term interventions are themselves part of the problem. When they close down, when distributions cease and camps are disbanded, people go back to the precarious place they came from: in harm's way, waiting for the next disaster. As seen elsewhere in Africa, the Horn undergoes an endless cycle of crisis-relief-crisis.

“On their own, short-term interventions are themselves part of the problem.”

Over the past two decades great efforts have been made to respond to emergency needs. But little has been done to break the cycle. **The solution must to be long-term commitment to making vulnerable communities resilient, building capacity within them.** Drought in itself is not a disaster, merely a natural hazard. Catastrophe only occurs when it overwhelms human settlement that is unprepared and vulnerable to it.

Nowhere is that more evident than in Kenya. 2011 is said to be the eastern Horn's driest year on record, the drought it has brought the worst in 60 years. Why is it then that within the hardest hit regions there are oases of hope,

where crops are growing, where people are feeding themselves, are food secure, and where surplus harvest is sold to pay for life's other essentials?

The population of neighbouring districts may live with the fear of famine, but thousands of others are turning the tide, helped by the Kenya Red Cross Society. Diversifying livelihoods, they are adapting themselves to survive and flourish. Formerly destitute pastoralists, dependent on food aid in previous droughts, are among the success stories. For while elsewhere the bush may be grey and dead here banana trees grow, papaya, tomatoes and kale too. Farmers harvest rice in places and animals graze on the stalks they leave behind.

The Red Cross empowers them to irrigate, supplies tools, seeds and other agricultural inputs. It trains them in modern farming techniques, in vital non-rainfed practices, in disaster risk reduction, and provides medical outreach programmes and health education essential to community advancement.

Modest perhaps, compared to the scale of the surrounding disaster, but **these interventions show the way ahead and underline the value of long-term investment in sustainable solutions**, alongside emergency relief. Backing up the humanitarian argument, there is also an economic one: a startling cost-benefit ratio, a massive return on the amount of money invested.

This report argues that humanitarian investment must go beyond alleviating short term suffering and stress, and can and should concentrate on enabling people living in arid lands to build viable and food secure futures.

Roots of the disaster

Drought is endemic to the Horn and no one has known it otherwise. The fluctuations of rainfall have been noted for as long as records have been kept, and pastoralist communities have lived and thrived through peaks and troughs of precipitation for centuries. So to understand why intense dry seasons turn into crises today, we need to look beyond the shortage of rain. It is wrong to blame it all on climate change. **Ways of life must adapt to new challenges.**

It is the Somali communities who are worst affected when the Horn is engulfed by drought, inhabitants of the driest regions that stretch across modern borders, those of Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti.

For hundreds of years, these people were masters of survival, developing methods to cope with drought, reducing livestock to numbers that were sustainable, migrating across the arid lands to where experience told them water and pasture could be found, keeping emergency wells, preserving fall-back areas for grazing, and turning to alternative sources of income such as the making of charcoal.

“To understand why intense dry seasons turn into crises today, we need to look beyond the shortage of rain. It is wrong to blame it all on climate change. Ways of life must adapt to new challenges.”

Although more and more pastoralists have abandoned a nomadic life, those who remain continue to practise the strategies that formerly did rather well. When drought bites in north-eastern Kenya, they herd their animals into Ethiopia and Somalia in the hope of finding coastal rains that may have restored some pasture.

A changed landscape

But the Horn has changed, socially, economically, environmentally. Politics, international borders, war and changed demographics disrupt traditional methods, leaving livelihoods based upon them with little chance of success. The realities of the modern day overwhelm most pastoral communities as they search for safe paths through the periods of recurring drought. Most struggle to survive on their animals in the best of times, let alone maintain herds that are large enough to sustain them in troubled ones.

Borders divide the Somali lands restricting the migration that once ensured survival. On traditional routes, national park fences and farm enclosures limit access to grazing and water points, and pursuing what there is can lead to violence. Regional conflict has left the arid lands awash with weapons, and neighbouring tribes are well armed. Minor pastoralist quarrels quickly turn into serious clashes.

All this undermines the pastoralist's viability and an even greater change exacerbates every challenge: the explosive growth of the population. **There are five times more people in the drought-stricken pastoral areas than there were 60 years ago, five times as many families trying to raise five times as many animals.** The arid lands' natural resource base is affected by more than

a lack of rain. Such pressure on pasture and water rapidly diminishes them, and extended dry seasons rapidly turn into crises.

National parks are great for tourism, but along with increasing amounts of land moving into private ownership, the space left for animals to use for grazing has diminished.

The pastoralist is left with fewer and fewer options, as the environmental damage of charcoal production shows. The trusted old fallback has relieved the Horn of vast tracts of forest cover.

No wonder people have grasped at the main alternative livelihood that most aid agencies have offered: the handout. With large-scale relief over the years they have unwittingly created a dependence on it. They have propped up unviable lifestyles and blended emergency aid into everyday coping mechanisms. **Food aid saves lives – and is desperately needed – but, when dependency follows, livelihoods suffer in the long term. That contributes nothing to lasting solutions.**

Importance of an integrated approach

Expert studies have suggested an inter-related series of measures are needed to help manage the impact of cyclical crisis such as the Horn of Africa's. Among them:

- Empower communities to influence national policy and its implementation, to decide on their own development and humanitarian priorities and enable them to monitor the use of funding allocated to them.
- Establish joint accountability mechanisms that ensure public, development and aid funding is directed and spent adequately based on the priorities identified by communities.
- Governments need to increase investment in community infrastructure and social services with a focus on education suitable to lifestyles in arid areas, market infrastructure, development of small businesses and alternative livelihoods that complement pastoralism.
- Smallholder farmers and pastoralists should be supported by investment in innovative natural resource management, increased access to information, flexible and adequate financial schemes and services and introduction of resilient livestock breeds and crop varieties.
- Fairer trade relations and transparent foreign investments in natural resources should be established to ensure natural resource sustainability, and a fair return comes back to local communities without jeopardising their traditional livelihood sources.
- Farmers and pastoralists need access to timely weather forecast information, early response funding mechanisms and technical support.
- Community risk management strategies must be developed and implemented.
- A twin-track approach must bridge the divide between humanitarian aid and development to ensure sustainable livelihoods with a focus on strengthening community resilience, good governance and equitable distribution of public budgets and investments.
- Continued efforts need to be made to mitigate conflicts, ensure regional peace and security. This might include establishing safe crossing corridors for pastoralists to facilitate their access to grazing and water resources.

In the long term, sustainable livelihoods do reduce food insecurity, and the IFRC believes it essential to support and protect them.

“The Horn has changed, socially, economically, environmentally. Politics, war and demographics disrupt traditional methods, leaving livelihoods based upon them with little chance of success.”

“Emergency relief must not be allowed to shield governments from healthy accountability.”

Saving lives will always be the first priority of humanitarian action, meeting immediate needs in a crisis. Be that as it may, safeguarding people’s capacity to turn their lives around by reviving their own economies, must be an underlying focus.

And if we are to do that we must listen to people’s aspirations. Huge shifts are occurring in the Horn, from pastoralism to farming, from farming to urban dwelling, a transition from the old ways, an attempt to escape from dependence on rain. Some succeed, some fail, some are caught in the middle. It is a rough transition and the need for assistance – not only for the failed but also for those whose progress points to a future for arid lands – is paramount. **Cushioning change, rewarding adaptation, providing those who move with soft landings, will, if managed well, reduce the current vulnerability and help pave the way to long-term answers.**

Of course, nothing does more to prevent cycles of drought from turning into crises than committed and responsible government. Humanitarian intervention must never undermine or supersede this. **Our role is to assist, to complement. Emergency relief must not be allowed to shield governments from healthy accountability.**

A child in North East Kenya waits for a water tank to be filled. The rains have failed twice and now nothing grows in this village.



How to prevent future crises

The late-August outlook from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network offered Kenya little respite. A food security map showed it mostly in “crisis” and “emergency” on the scale of severity.

A great band of emergency blanketed much of the country’s northeast, and looked set to swallow the last few pockets of mere crisis in the hard-hit districts of Mandera, pushing them into emergency. The short rains last November had failed, the long rains of March to May had been wretched, the water pans were dry and the pastoralists had migrated with their animals, deep into neighbouring Ethiopia.

People were suffering badly and surviving on food aid. But not four groups of farmers in otherwise troubled Rhamu division. As August came to an end they began to harvest bountiful crops of vegetables.

Much the same story could be found in Isiolo District. While neighbouring areas were facing famine, farmers in Burat were cropping tomatoes, maize and onions.

Nor were there only pockets of hope. In Tana River District, which acquires its name from Kenya’s longest waterway, 3,300 acres of farmland was flourishing, growing banana, mango, capsicum, cowpeas, mung beans, water melon, tomatoes and pawpaw, maintaining livestock, providing food for thousands of people.

“While neighbouring areas were facing famine, farmers in Burat were cropping tomatoes, maize, and onion.”

Change, adaptation and innovation

These are just some of a raft of Kenya Red Cross Society efforts to empower communities to become food secure, to fend for themselves, to rise above the



Women sell their produce at a market in Garissa, Kenya. They now have enough to feed their families and to earn an income.

hazards and manage the opportunities. They are about change, adaptation and innovation, and what they seek is safety and dignity.

Here was determined investment in solutions to prevent future crises. Said Secretary General Abbas Gullet: “These are long-term food security options that aim to build self-sustainability and to avoid over-reliance on food aid. Look, when our people go hungry we are far too late. Hunger in Kenya is non-sense and the key to these issues is early action.”

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Kenya Red Cross Society

The Tana River Drought Recovery Project has turned life around for once destitute farmers in one of Kenya’s poorest areas. For more than ten years, recurring drought, and destructive flood, had exacerbated poverty. Some 77 per cent of Tana North District’s population – originally mostly pastoralist – was living below the poverty line, and more than half of those were unable to meet even basic food needs. Relief and other handouts were all that sustained them, while their plight was reflected in their state of health, particularly in that of mothers and children. Acute malnutrition among the under fives was peaking in times of drought, and contributed to infant mortality 60 per cent higher than the national average.

A return on investment

After a 1997 drought wiped out much of their livestock, and left them unable to support their families, **some pastoralists turned to farming**. More dry years followed and they struggled; in the wake of persistent drought from 2007 to 2009 the Red Cross stepped in to help. With US\$700,000 from the Japanese government they set about assisting recovery from the torrid past couple of years and promoting livelihoods through improved and diversified production and seasonal income options.

Farmers in three communities were helped to expand the cropped land, and 1,200 acres were ploughed and harrowed for them. Tonnes of seeds and thousands of seedlings were distributed, and irrigation pumps supplied to better utilize water from the nearby Tana. The river is a permanent one which does run lower during drought but continues to flow. It is the main source of water and with the farms, on average, 500 metres from it, its use for irrigation not only allows far greater production, but massively reduces reliance on rain.

As for animals lost to the drought, the Red Cross restocked the households most affected with modest but viable herds of goats and sheep in collaboration

Former pastoralists have learnt how to pump water from the Tana River and now grow a variety of crops that not only feed their families but provides a regular income.



with the Ministry of Livestock. Close to 60 per cent of families within the project now have animals and 26 per cent sell animal products, goat's milk the biggest seller. **So for the communities, sustainable livestock means both nutrition and income.**

The proof of the pudding, though, is in the eating. Elsewhere in Tana River district people still depend on food aid but not in the communities in Madogo, Bura and Bangale divisions where the Red Cross is working. The farmers, indeed, have informed the government relief food is no longer needed.

Farmer Aden Shekh put it this way: "As a farmer I can send my children to school, and we do not go hungry during drought such as we have today. Now, there is life. There is also self-belief. There is dignity. The man's neighbour said: "I can't be a pastoralist anymore because of how I suffered. I just want to expand my farm and add canals and more machines in order to help the community. Things have improved for me, things have settled down. I am happy."

Success has fed his ambition but his perspective has changed as well, with knowledge of modern techniques, opportunity and agricultural best practice. Practical training in field schools has provided new insight into preparing the land and planting different crops. The former pastoralists have learnt about pests and disease, and the measures they should take to control them. They have learnt how to conserve the soil and the environment, while animal health workers have been schooled in inspection and vaccination procedures.

Targeting public health

As much as the farmers need access to water for the fields, the communities need access to clean water for their health. Poor health indicators – linked to the poverty level – are a contributory factor to drought becoming disaster. Avoiding illness during drought can best be achieved by being healthy beforehand. **Breaking the cycle that leads especially to poor maternal and child health**, is intrinsic to breaking the cycle of poverty and drought.

Already the Kenya Red Cross Society has focussed on public health. Shallow wells have been dug or rehabilitated and access to clean water improved for 30,000 people. Average trekking distances to the nearest supply have been brought down from 3.5 km to less than 1 km, and a new water pan will also contribute. When good rains do come and the pan is filled, 1,500 more households will be brought closer. Today some travel 5 km. Better sanitation and hygiene promotion has been in the programme as well.

Much more is to come. Seeing the outcome of one year's intervention, and the return on its investment, the Japanese government is extending its support for a second year. With that has come a US\$400,000 maternal child health project.

Let the final word here rest with a politician. Aden Duale, member of parliament for one of the areas the Red Cross has assisted across the river in Garissa District, told *The Standard* daily newspaper, "People always think of the arid north as a land of banditry, drought and conflict. If we continue empowering the people I see the whole Tana ecosystem feeding half of this country."

All that was needed, he said, was more Kenyan government funding to irrigate the fertile lands lying along the mighty Tana.

How food security pays off

Avoiding hunger in the Horn of Africa is far cheaper than responding to it. While a price can never be placed on life, food security costs a fraction of food relief and provides long-term solutions to the region's recurring crises.

The conclusion is drawn by the IFRC from a comparison made in Kenya during the present drought. For a tenth of the cost of six months of food aid, an irrigated agriculture project gave almost 10,000 people a sustainable source of food and income.

Moreover, the Kenya Red Cross Society intervention more than paid for itself in its first year; its revenue calculated to be over ten times the investment.

With a budget of 30 million Kenyan shillings (about 235,000 US dollars), the project created 33 farms supporting 9,900 people along the Tana River. Each of the 1,650 farmers involved earned a return worth 20,000 shillings (about 156 dollars) a month.

Using estimated costs, the same budget could have given 1,250 people a partial food ration for six months, after which they would have returned to where they had started: still in harm's way.

The comparison, the IFRC stresses, is indicative only as some calculations are based on approximations but the conclusion is unequivocal. Food security and disaster risk reduction are both effective and cost efficient. The wisest investments are those in sustainable long-term solutions.

Speaking up in Tana River

The sound of a truck causes heads to turn in a poor nomadic camp of a few round huts in a disregarded corner of Tana River. Bouncing down the track in a cloud of dust comes a pick-up. The cloud engulfs the camp, pastoralists cover their faces but through the murk follow the truck intently. A question is being pondered. Our way of life may be ending but could another be opening up?

The camp dwellers belong to the 77 per cent of Tana North District's population who live below the poverty line and, like more than half of those, cannot provide their basic needs. They have a chronic reliance on food aid.

The truck belongs to a group of flourishing farmers – most of them former pastoralists – who have found new hope with a Kenya Red Cross Society sustainable livelihoods project. Despite the deepening drought in which the poor get only poorer, it is on its way to market piled high with plump bananas.

The driver explains: "We have 60 bunches to sell today, and they weigh about 800 kilograms. We'll get up to 12 shillings a kilo for them." He is expecting the equivalent of US\$75, and is making the trip twice a week. For Tana North he is doing good business, and the bananas he will sell are only those surplus to the farmers' own needs.

Up here in Modogo, one of three divisions where the Tana River Drought Recovery Project is supporting farmers, the crisis so evident elsewhere is held at bay by the intervention. Not all has gone exactly to plan and there are challenges, they say, in clearing more land. But success can be seen in productive land and in the smiles etched on their faces.

Mohammed's story

Among trees on the western bank of the Tana, Mohammed Adan, 47, watches as water pumped from the river pours into channels that lead to the fields. He nods, satisfied. He has known bad times but is confident they are now behind him. As a pastoralist he saw all his livestock die in the drought of 1997, and was obliged to turn his hand to other things. As a charcoal maker, he failed to meet the needs of his family. As a subsistence farmer, he struggled to feed them from a low-yield quarter of an acre.

"I have a full acre today. I grow good crops," he says. "I feed my family well and sell the surplus. My children go to school because we can afford the fees, we live in a tin-roofed house, and we have a supply of clean water." What more does he want? Does he have dreams? "Mm, to be a better farmer, with two, three, four acres of land. I want my children to be sure of a good education."

Kunya's story

He has new aspirations like most of his fellow farmers, looking away from reliance on rain. Kunya Guyo, 94, is an elder of the Munyoyaya tribe, a marginalized group who account for many of the Red Cross farmers, and education concerns him as well. It tops his list of priorities, for Tana North has sky-high illiteracy rates. Food security means more than full bellies, he says. It gives people options, and the chance to progress.

It is why he wants the already expanding project replicated along the Tana. "Our people live right along it and outside the project so many farmers are struggling." Seeing the success of people within it, they are eager to follow suit, he says.

Hadija's story

One of them is Hadija Kiona, 45, a mother of six. With her husband now ill, she's the family's breadwinner and dreams of returning to farming. "We were farmers before but then we had drought... In the end we had nothing left."

Importantly for her, the Tana River project also embraces healthcare. As well as alarming malnutrition, the district has Kenya's worst infant mortality rate. Hadija herself has lost three children, one of them during childbirth, and so have many of her friends.

The Red Cross is intervening with a maternal child health programme, providing the district dispensary with a maternity wing, improving preventative health, strengthening ante-natal care and child immunisation, and supporting outreach services.

"Sometimes people die because they can't get proper assistance," she explains. "Or it's too far away and by the time you get there it's too late." The district possesses no ambulance.

As a farmer, she says, her priority is feeding her family. As a mother it is medical care.

Amid the drought, a fear of flood

The Tana isn't the only river the Kenya Red Cross Society has used to turn around the fortunes of pastoralists who have shifted to agriculture. Up in the extreme northeast, close to the borders of both Ethiopia and Somalia, the Daua river flows out of the Ethiopian highlands across the tip of Kenya.

The Red Cross stepped in here because of flood not drought, but among the Kenyan crises flood and drought are inextricably linked. Food security is assaulted on all sides and while a drought can be the worst a farmer remembers he can still be afraid of a coming flood.

As Hassan Yunis, 71, a farmer in northeastern Kenya's Balambala division described his fears in the 2009 crisis, "Rain? We either have too little or we have far too much." Any goats he had that survived the drought would, he said, die in the flood that would follow.

A flooding Daua did more than that to farmers on its banks in Rhamu division. The river, that runs for eight to ten months of the year, simply destroyed the farmland, washing away both soil and crops, and depositing silt, with such frequency that many people just gave up. The untended fields were soon choking with weeds, reverting to bush, and mosquitoes acquired a breeding ground. Malaria became endemic. **With livelihoods gone and health precarious, some farmers returned to the pastoral life where intensifying drought assailed them.** They were caught between the river and a harder place.

Without flood protection, rivers that could help families grow crops instead ruin the land and destroy livelihoods

Flood protection

With support from the Norwegian Red Cross, Kenya Red Cross Society moved in to help 200 farmers in four locations. Flood protection went up - rock-filled metal mesh gabions covered with earth - defending the land at critical points where the river was most likely to burst its banks. The land was cleared again and pumps fed the irrigation system.

There is still much work to be done, and more funding is needed to extend flood protection and upgrade irrigation with canals that bring water to fields far away from the river. In the meantime the farmers are pressing ahead



In previous years, a serious drought has lead to flooding, destroying both the homes and livelihoods of many people.

improving the old irrigation system, digging ponds as reservoirs and pumping the water further.

The current crisis underlines the achievement. **By protecting the farmers from flood, the intervention has removed them from deepening drought.** Away from the river the land is dead. Nothing grows. Little moves and most of what does can no longer be considered an asset.

Action yields results

A green belt runs along the river, though, where the farmers lift crops onto communal rafts and pole them to town to sell at the market. At the height of the drought they were harvesting, and harvesting more than they had ever envisaged: onions, tomatoes, watermelon as well as maize, and fodder for their sheep and goats. Self-sufficient in food, they are self-sufficient in seed as well. This year they needed none.

As in Tana River, the inputs have come with training, education and guidance and where yields had averaged 120 bags of maize per hectare, they are now at 480.

Farmer Haji Omar does better than that. Last season he managed 500 bags of 50 kilograms each.

He was one of those forced by the floods to abandon his farm which makes him doubly proud and determined. Today 165 metres of flood protection line his land, high-powered pumps bring him water, and farmers elsewhere are envious.

“How does that work?” they ask him.

Haji Omar tells them and passes on his knowledge. His colleagues do the same, and sometimes equipment is borrowed. People are helping one another.

The project cannot cover every farmer, or secure the whole river bank, and many fields remain unproductive. But there is momentum along the Daua, the harvests drawing farmers back to the land that not so long ago they were driven from.

“The inputs have come with training, education and guidance and where yields had averaged 120 bags of maize per hectare, they are now at 480.”

People who previously relied on food handouts, now can grow their own nutritious crops.



Underground promise

Rivers bring life but far from their banks in the arid lands there are other prospects. Says Kenya Red Cross Society's Abbas Gullet, "In northern Kenya, even in Turkana, water is only 50 metres below the earth."

Running beneath North Eastern Province's Lagdera District, indeed, is the Horn's largest aquifer, created by the Ewaso Nyiro river. As part of efforts to improve the lot of 20,000 drought-stricken former pastoralists – and among other things introduce small-scale irrigation farming – the Kenya Red Cross Society will tap the aquifer with two solar-powered boreholes each producing 40,000 litres per hour for ten hours a day.

The focal point is Dertu, a settlement of 6,500 people which sprang from food aid dependency. It grew from a food distribution point, and speaks volumes for the aid system's failure to bridge a catastrophic gap between humanitarian and development assistance. **It illustrates why the IFRC has long called for a review of humanitarian action and a remodelling of its funding.**

We do not argue that funding to procure and distribute food should be redirected. Food aid saves lives. Without it many more people would suffer and die, but many could have been spared their present situation, the deprivations and dangers of places like Dertu.

You wouldn't look to lure destitute people to somewhere deep inside an arid area where rainfall can be scarce for the best part of ten years as it was from 1997. Or to somewhere that suffers erratic rains, with subsequent floods, outbreaks of pests and diseases, and isolation from markets. But that was the consequence of food aid. It persuaded pastoralist drop-outs who had lost their livestock in successive droughts to settle down where distributions were regular.

They did try their hands at farming by harvesting rain for irrigation but, with droughts more pronounced and more frequent, crops became limited at best. The sinking of a borehole only brought more people, migrating pastoralists, the increased number of animals and resulted in overgrazing. Today, some 64 per cent of the population live in absolute poverty, there is pervasive malnutrition, a high level of maternal and child mortality, extremely low levels of literacy, and poor infrastructure. Dertu is a grossly under-served area.

Nevertheless, the Kenya Red Cross Society – funded by its Finnish and Norwegian sister societies – is confident there is opportunity. Ayaz Manji, head of its water and sanitation department, explains, "Using the aquifer's water, we plan to open up an initial 50 acres of farming with drip irrigation. Much more can be done with dry land irrigation in Kenya, and the aquifer under Lagdera is certainly under-utilized. We'll start with one hundred farming families, about 650 people, but once food begins to be produced more people will certainly come on board and we'll be able to scale up substantially."

A growth model

The farms are expected to serve as models of irrigated agriculture, the food they grow producing a ripple effect, creating jobs and business opportunities as well as feeding far more than the targeted families through the sale of surplus on markets. Dadaab's market, with its refugee populations 50 to 60 kilometres away, will be among them.

"In Dertu, some 64 per cent of the population live in absolute poverty, there is pervasive malnutrition, a high level of maternal and child mortality, extremely low levels of literacy, and poor infrastructure."

The project will construct a 50,000-cubic metre lined water pan along with the boreholes, install drip irrigation systems serving both farmland and greenhouses, establish seedling nurseries, and support the provision of quality agro inputs including seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals, farm tools, and extension services.

The greenhouses will be used for horticulture while the fields will produce both fodder and drought-resistant crops. Water systems will allow for adequate storage even in times of drought, and along with the increased fodder sustain milk as well as food production. Livestock services will strengthen pastoralism.

Much has to be done on public health also. Only ten per cent of the population makes use of latrines today, and knowledge of hygiene will be increased along with access to basic sanitation. Again, sufficient clean water for domestic use is needed and some 20 litres per person per day will flow from protected sources. Dertu is about sustainable community development which means it must also “own” it, and training will enhance such capacity as community management, conflict resolution and problem solving.

Places such as Dertu are putting down markers. Lessons will be learned but what can work here can work elsewhere in the Horn of Africa where the vulnerable are marginalized and helped only to survive, rather than flourish.





Kenya Red Cross Society's Sahal Abdi proudly shows off the fruit the Tana River community has grown to help them through this drought.

Conclusions

What needs to happen on the road ahead

What assails the Horn today is a chronic crisis rooted in past complexity and major socio-economic developments. Lives and livelihoods have been undermined paving the way for recurring drought to exacerbate poverty, ill health and hunger. With outdated means of coping bound to fail, the Horn limps in and out of disaster.

Some distress can be relieved through emergency action but that alone papers over the problems. Aid simply poured in time and time again ignores the real needs and extends the suffering. In the end it is irresponsible.

So what needs to occur on the road ahead if the Horn is to escape a permanent state of disaster?

“Aid simply poured in time and time again ignores the real needs and extends the suffering. In the end it is irresponsible.”

- The IFRC advocates a long-term approach, one that learns from the lessons of past responses. While working to meet emergency needs of drought-affected people, chronic underlying issues must be addressed, as the Red Cross Red Crescent already does with a regional commitment.
- Governments, donors and humanitarian agencies must focus on preventing future crises, on building resilience in threatened communities, on empowering people to identify their development priorities, and diversifying livelihood options. What is needed is intelligent investment in sustainable change, in commitment to long-term solutions.
- Integrated strategy is needed. It is why the IFRC is supporting the Horn's Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies as they invest in adaptation, innovate in their approach to water and food security, strengthen livelihoods and tackle healthcare and social issues. Partners are urged to work with us at a pace that can support these quality programmes.
- When a drought turns into a human catastrophe and media attention motivates increased funding from individuals and institutions, humanitarian organisations must capitalise on the opportunity to secure funds for long term programmes. Only by investing well when there are resources available, can we really contribute to preventing the next disaster.
- More must be done to protect communities from unpredictable and soaring food prices. The IFRC is extremely alarmed by prices in the Horn that are artificial, and significantly higher than those being paid in the rest of the world. Shortages and near-historic prices for staples such as corn, wheat, and sugar have magnified the impact of the present drought. These issues are explored in the *World Disasters Report 2011*.
- As elsewhere, disaster risk reduction in communities has to become a priority. Without that, the world will fail to achieve the targets set by the UN's Millennium Development Goals: to decrease poverty, hunger, disease and death.

The bottom line is this: drought will remain a common occurrence in the Horn. We know that in two or three years what is happening now will be repeated.

Will those who suffered greatly this time around, suffer as much again? Or will national governments in the Horn, will humanitarian agencies, will the international community, will alert and questioning media, have helped reduce the risks poor communities face and restored both hope and dignity? Will we have done what we can, as Abbas Gullet puts it, to rein in the region's pain? Or will responsibility be abrogated?

Providing relief on the present scale will be a reflection of failure.

The Kenya Red Cross Society is focused on discussing long term solutions with communities, to find a way to ensure the next generation doesn't experience the same devastating effects of drought.



Other examples

This report focuses on examples of sustainable food security programmes in Kenya. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement operates through its network of National Societies across Africa, regularly responding to, and preparing for drought emergencies. Below are two more examples of successful food security interventions.

30 years investment in Red Sea Hills of Sudan

The Sudanese Red Crescent adopted an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that includes food security/livelihoods, health, water and sanitation, education, and women's development to the same communities over an extended period of time. The cost benefit analysis done in 2009 indicated that the programme had considerable impact on the targeted population. Activities such as the terraces and earth dams/embankments enabled households to undertake successful agricultural activities, providing food both for consumption and the possibility to diversify diets as and to sell produce and earn an income. The cost benefit analysis indicated that these projects were economically efficient with a cost benefit ratio of greater than 1:25 in some interventions. Water projects such as the installation of hand-pumps and the construction of 'hafirs' have also impacted positively on pastoral communities. The 'centres for women' are enabling women to gain new skills and knowledge including literacy, health and nutrition awareness, which is being translated into their household practices of improving health and hygiene for the entire family. These interventions have influenced the Beja traditions and societal norms positively and will continue to do so in the future.

Building resilient communities in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Each year, on average, more than 10 million people – out of a population of almost 83 million – have problems in getting enough food for themselves and their families and the current drought is deepening the crisis. In Tigray, the country's northern-most state, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, in cooperation with the IFRC and the Swedish Red Cross, has set up a programme that focuses in part on improving alternative agricultural production. Technical training in dairy farming, cattle-fattening and bee-keeping are key elements. After training, people can join a saving and credit scheme and are loaned money to purchase livestock, for example. Amina Haji, a divorced woman with five children, is benefitting from the project. The Red Cross trained her to manage cattle-fattening, the feeding and marketing of animals. She has also benefited from becoming a member of the project's saving and credit cooperative. She has found that cattle-fattening is a profitable activity and her annual income has almost doubled. The result: she saves money each month, sends all her school-age children to school and is able to feed her family three times a day. "Being a beneficiary of the project has changed my life completely," she says.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality / It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality / In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence / The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service / It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity / There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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