

BULLETIN

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Somalia and the Humanitarian Crisis in the Horn of Africa

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The drought in the Horn of Africa has, for the first time in half a century, brought famine to the continent. While humanitarian agencies have warned the international community about the looming crisis, little preventative action has been taken. With the entire region affected, the famine is most severe in Somalia. This conflict-ridden, highly inaccessible, failed state exemplifies the importance of strong national institutions and disaster-management planning.

The drought in the Horn of Africa, hailed as the worst drought in more than 60 years, is no longer headline news. Yet, tens of thousands of people continue to die from lack of food, inadequate health measures and a dangerously poor national security situation, particularly in Somalia. As a result of the drought, in July 2011, for the first time since the 1980s, the UN declared famine in Africa.

Funding. Humanitarian agencies, such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have been sending out alerts since last year about the approaching drought. For various reasons, including the global financial crisis that continues to affect the North, a lack of political will and ongoing conflict in the region, funding has been slow to come in or non-existent. So far, less than 60% of the required funding has been donated. The European Union (EU) is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the Horn, having pledged almost \$600 million to this crisis alone. While the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation held an emergency meeting in mid-August to pledge \$350 million to aid efforts in Somalia and the African Development Bank is providing \$300 million, the African Union has come up short of the \$50 million target humanitarian NGOs set for it.

Only four heads of state attended the emergency summit, with African powerhouses such as Nigeria and South Africa donating less than expected. This disappointing response is symptomatic of the Union's usual slowness and often ineffective management of crises. In addition, the organization is suffering from funding cuts with its main donor, Muammar Qaddafi, out of power in Libya.

Political situation and aid. What food aid exists is being hampered by politics and a lack of security. Somalia is considered one of the most inaccessible countries in the world because of the difficult political situation and ongoing conflict between the weak, but internationally-backed Somali government, and Al Shabaab, an Islamist militia. The militia controls large areas of Somalia, particularly in the south, where security is extremely low and foreign agencies have few, if any, personnel in the area. Al Shabaab, which has banned all aid to the country since 2008 and considers Western agencies to be anti-Muslim, has been blocking attempts by the starving population to flee to neighbouring countries or northern Somalia.

Furthermore, many aid agencies have been reluctant to work in Al Shabaab-held areas since the U.S. declared them a terrorist organization. Any material support given to a terrorist group is against U.S. law and may result in serious funding cuts from the U.S. should such support be suspected. As it is practically impossible to guarantee that Al Shabaab will not access at least part of the food aid available in areas they control, many organizations have not entered Somalia. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Al Shabaab has various factions, and the lack of a unified voice makes it difficult to negotiate access to thus far unapproachable areas.

However, the recent death of a key leader and the severity of the crisis have moved some factions of the group to allow aid from Western organizations into the country. While the south is still largely

inaccessible, Al Shabaab has officially retreated from Mogadishu, allowing aid agencies to access the capital. Although this has increased access to food and water for the city's population, violence continues to be an issue due to the fact that the government has been unable to sufficiently control its police force to allow for a smooth distribution of resources. Furthermore, small pockets of Al Shabaab remain in the city despite the official retreat.

While this drought is affecting over 12 million people, the famine in Somalia is the most severe. In Ethiopia and Kenya on the other hand, the national governments have been slow to recognize the growing issue, preferring not to acknowledge the famine, whose existence could be read as a failure on their parts. These countries have fared better than Somalia, largely because of various aid programs that have been in place since the 1980s. Many include not only food aid but also seeds for crops and programs that help turn unproductive areas into arable land. Others include school meal programs, such as in Kenya, where even in the drought-hit areas children continue to receive at least one meal a day while at school. It is unfortunate that not many of these projects have been undertaken in Somalia, where the political situation has disallowed such preventative measures. The lack of a central government and emergency planning have left southern Somalia, in particular, extremely vulnerable.

According to forecasts, the coming rainy season in Kenya and Ethiopia toward the end of the year will provide normal rainfalls. In Somalia, however, it is expected to yield less-than-average rainfalls well into January. Conditions in Somalia are worsening, and the famine is expected to persist over the next several months as continued drought and rising food prices add to the stresses of poverty, poor healthcare and sanitation, prolonged conflict, and a lack of strong government institutions.

Concluding remarks. This crisis underscores the importance of development policy, which aids in the building of strong government institutions and well-laid emergency plans. Although Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti are also experiencing a severe drought, food insecurity is lower in these countries when compared to Somalia because local governments have taken action to abate its worst effects. Even the unrecognized Somaliland, where government institutions are strong, is faring better than Somalia. Besides state-building, preventative measures in response to signals from early warning systems have significant economic advantages for international actors. The UN estimates that every \$1 spent on preventative measures saves \$7 in emergency spending.

As noted by the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, long-term measures must be taken to build resilience to drought and avoid famine conditions in the future. Such resilience can only be established in countries where human security is high and strong governments and institutions are able to provide emergency relief during extreme circumstances, such as droughts, but also where there is education in adaptation techniques, drought-resistant agriculture and adequate sanitation.

Recommendations. The international community has long avoided specific action in Somalia, given past failures and a large number of deaths of both aid workers and soldiers in Al Shabaab-held areas. While the EU has been involved in interventions in Somalia for several years now, the current situation highlights the need for peacebuilding, strengthening of institutions and improving governance in the country. The EU should prioritize its development policies and peacebuilding efforts to focus on securing peace, building strong government institutions and promoting education.

The crisis at hand may provide an excellent opportunity for the weak Somali government to better establish itself as it delivers aid to its citizens. The international community should encourage such action by engaging the legitimate rulers in aid efforts and increasing the number of peacekeepers in the country to help deliver aid as well as moving into areas previously held by Al Shabaab. Al Shabaab is divided and various factions are working against each other. The existing leadership no longer has complete command over the organization and is retreating from areas such as Mogadishu in response to the crisis. This, too, may be an opportunity for the government to strengthen its control over some parts of the country. In the short term, however, immediate help those suffering in the Horn must take priority, and the EU, led by the Polish presidency, should continue to keep abreast of the situation and coordinate any humanitarian efforts with expediency and efficiency.

Since the presidency is limited to a six-month term, Poland will not have the opportunity to significantly change its focus from its original plans as noted in its presidency programme. However, Poland will lead the EU during the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, which will take place in South Korea from 29 November to 1 December 2011. During that time, it will have a unique opportunity to assess the needs and opportunities for better coordination of EU development and aid policies. In addition, in the long-term, Poland should increase its focus on Africa and define a more permanent role for Polish interventions and assistance to the southern continent.