Unreported need: the effects of drought in Somaliland

A combination of conflict and drought leading to humanitarian catastrophe in South Somalia has understandably captured the attention of the world. Yet as international attention focuses on one disaster, next door, the self-declared independent state of Somaliland faces its very own drought-related crisis. Action now is essential to help communities emerge from the poverty brought on by successive failure of rains and to support them to move away from a cycle of drought and dependence.

Loss of livelihoods

Nomadic pastoralists in parts of Somaliland who depend on livestock for their living have suffered huge losses to their herds in recent months. Surveys carried out by HAVOYOCO among people displaced by drought in Togdheer, Sool and Sanag regions of Somaliland found that 59% of households reported they had lost all their livestock, forcing them to abandon their livelihoods and move to towns. A large number of animals have simply died due to lack of pasture and water while others have been sold in desperation as pastoralists tried to raise enough money to support their families as food and water prices skyrocket. Households and communities that were previously self-sufficient are now reduced to surviving on handouts from host communities in towns.
According to the Mayor of Yogori in Sool, 10 villages in the district are hosting 950 new households who had been forced to leave drought-affected areas. When HAVOYOCO spoke to Hawa Ali Kheyre in August, she had been in Yogori for 3 months, having lost all her livestock earlier in the year. “I have no income and am dependent on neighbours for survival”. She pointed to her frail mother lying on the ground in a temporary shelter. Hawa had had to borrow a wheelbarrow to transport her on the journey.

Ali Mohammed had only been in Yogori for 20 days. He and his household of 13 people had walked 30km, taking in a lone older man on the way. Ali had been left with only 2 goats from a herd of 120. He had lost all his camels. “There is no one left where we came from” he said. Families had scattered in different directions with no plans beyond surviving each day.

**Time to act**

There is an urgent need to support communities to survive the devastating effects of recurrent drought in Somaliland. Seasonal Gu rains did arrive in most areas of the country earlier in 2011, although levels were well below average in some districts. Life therefore remains extremely precarious for many communities.

Basic needs must be met immediately. The food security situation is deteriorating and malnutrition is rising in areas of Togdheer and Sool. Food, water and shelter are essential for those communities who have been left with nothing.

Meanwhile, it is essential not to lose sight of the longer term. In those areas where pasture has returned assisting pastoralists to restock decimated herds is a vital means of restoring livelihoods. Fadumo Xujale is 30 and has 3 children and a disabled husband. She lost all her livestock in 2009. HAVOYOCO, with the support of the Danish Refugee Council, gave her 10 goats and a donkey to support her family’s recovery in 2010. The impact on her life has been remarkable. “I can fetch on water from far places
and run away from the drought because of this gift [of a donkey]”. She goes on to highlight the fact that some of the goats were lactating and that this brings significant benefits to her and her family. “Soon and the next year, I expect my children to have enough milk and enough ghee and nutrition.”

An alternative strategy involves giving households the opportunity to earn some income while they devise longer term plans for livelihoods. Cash for work programmes pay local communities to carry out activities which assist in the regeneration of the environment affected by drought. Successive droughts have taken their toll on the land, destroying pasture and exposing soil to erosion when the rains finally arrive. HAVOYOCO-led projects to conserve soil and rehabilitate grassland help sustain the environment on which pastoralists depend. The small income earned by households for carrying out such activities can tide them over while they try and re-establish livestock herds or other means of earning a living.

Breaking the cycle of drought is incredibly difficult. Short term humanitarian support is essential to save lives now. However, over time pastoral communities in Somaliland need prolonged investment in enabling sustained access to safe water, better pasture management, improved livestock supply chains and promoting human and animal health. Such interventions could make the difference between a future in which pastoral communities in Somaliland lurch from disaster to disaster to one in which the most vulnerable take steps towards stable and secure livelihoods.

HAVOYOCO has a longstanding programme of work with 41 pastoral communities in Sool and Togdheer. HAVOYOCO provides practical assistance such as supporting income generation in communities and improving access to safe water through construction of water points and rehabilitation of shallow wells and boreholes. The organization also works with communities to promote democracy and human rights, focusing in particular on enabling women and young people to speak up for their rights. For more information, please contact Havoyoco@hotmail.com or see the website www.havoyoco.org