This document reviews food security in the Horn of Africa, including a brief overview of the 2011 crisis, current issues and forecasts for the future. For the purpose of this paper, the following countries were included: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Related information is available at www.cimicweb.org. Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text. All maps are hyperlinked to their source locations.

Synopsis 2011 Food Crisis

Early warning signs were evident in 2010 that food insecurity posed a significant risk to millions of citizens across the Horn of Africa (HoA). In November 2010, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) issued their first warnings that a food crisis might be imminent. Similarly, the USAID Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) predicted at least seven million people were dangerously exposed to three factors known to catalyse wide-scale famine: drought, escalating food prices, and on-going conflict. According to climate expert Rupa Kumar Kolli from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), “famines are man-made, whereas droughts are natural parts of the system.” Cycles of drought have ravaged the HoA for centuries and will continue to occur. When preventive action is initiated at an early stage, local resiliencies and international assistance can mitigate the effects of drought and stave off wide-scale famine.

The volatile combination of rising food prices, violent conflict, and drought in 2010 resulted in the devastating food crisis that enveloped the region in early 2011. Additionally, two secondary factors contributed to the disaster. According to WFP, the restricted access to humanitarian assistance in the HoA, coupled with swelling populations of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), transformed the 2010 drought into an international food crisis. By August 2011, the catastrophe had fully erupted. During the height of the Horn of Africa (HoA) food crisis in 2011, more...
than thirteen million people were affected by the worst drought\(^1\) in over six decades, a natural disaster that contributed to crop failure and high food prices, placing millions in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Somalia was impacted the most by the drought and in July 2011, the United Nations (UN) declared famine\(^2\) in two southern regions of the country. Approximately four million people in Somalia alone were affected and an estimated 750,000 Somalis were at risk of starvation over the next several months. In search of food, water and to escape violence, nearly 200,000 people left their homes and became internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees.

**Food Security Classification**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines food security as a condition “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. This definition was adopted in 1996 at the World Food Summit and is universally recognised as a standard by WFP, FAO, and most international humanitarian NGOs. Less codified are the drivers of food insecurity, which range from the poverty trap to natural disasters (including drought), environmental degradation, economic volatility (including fluctuation in food prices), changes in climate, and violent conflict. A combination of these factors is usually more potent than an isolated characteristic. Therefore, the risk of food insecurity increases as the number of factors converge in a single country or region.

In order to assess the level and severity of food insecurity in a given population, UN agencies and partner organisations developed the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in 2004. The IPC framework consolidates data about food security, nutrition and livelihood information to develop a situation analysis from which policy-makers and practitioners can implement a strategic response appropriate to the degree of food insecurity. The IPC categorises the food security spectrum into five phases, ranging from Phase I (“generally food secure”) to Phase 5 (“famine/humanitarian catastrophe”). “Famine” is the gravest category; trademarks include “extreme social upheaval with complete lack of food access and / or other basic needs where mass starvation, death and displacement are evident”.

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Table 1: General Descriptions of Integrated Food Security Phase Classification’s (IPC) Phases

Once analysis has been conducted, the IPS framework serves as an operational tool and recommends appropriate actions for correlating phases of insecurity. Phases 4 and 5 usually involve severe social disruption, such as large-scale migration, starvation, and conflict. Prevention efforts should be initiated before Phase 4 and 5 are declared in

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1. Drought is a deficiency of precipitation over an extended period of time, usually a season or more, which results in a water shortage for some activity, group, or environmental sectors.

2. Famine is declared when acute malnutrition rates among children exceed thirty percent; more than 2 people per 10,000 die per day; and people are not able to access food and other basic necessities.
order to mitigate drought factors and stymie a food security crisis. Yet despite the early warning systems, adequate prevention efforts failed to materialise.

According to the UK Department for International Development (DFID), at the height of the 2011 food crisis, most of the HoA region contained populations that were deemed to meet food security characteristics of “stress”, if not “crisis”, “emergency”, or “famine”. Large segments of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia were classified as Phase 4 and 5 on the IPC scale, meaning that thirty per cent of children were “acutely malnourished” and twenty per cent of the population was entirely “without food”. Nine months prior to these realities, in October and November 2010, surveys and analysis, including IPC assessments, conducted by FEWS NET showed that food security conditions were deteriorating rapidly. By 2011 Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia were among the top five recipients of emergency food aid in the world.

Table 2: Major Recipients of Emergency Food Aid 2010-2011

Regional Humanitarian Response
The UN declared a famine in Somalia on 20 July 2011, once malnutrition rates in the country were the highest in the world. According to Duncan Graves, head of research for Oxfam, “We’re not behaving like good risk managers”. Former Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, described the failure to prevent famine by the international community: “Early signs of an oncoming crisis were clear many months before the emergency reached its peak. Yet it was not until the situation had reached crisis point that the international system started to respond at scale.” In Somalia, Save the Children operations scaled up from USD 4.8 million in July 2011 to USD 48.2 million in October 2011, representing a response to Phase 5 conditions, but not preventive action.

Once an international response was necessitated, unmet financial requests hampered humanitarian response efforts. Donors did not fail to respond entirely, although they pledged only fifty per cent of required funds. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requested USD 2.49 billion for emergency activities, of which USD 1.22 billion was funded by July 2012. Dozens of international agencies eventually responded. These included NGOs such as CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children, as well as UN bodies and bilateral development agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and DFID. Despite the eventual response, the overarching consensus that emerged from the 2011 food crisis was the need for a comprehensive recovery plan by the international community in the future to prevent cycles of food crisis in the HoA. In addition to faster aid responses, organisations highlighted the need to improve community resiliencies and to develop permanent, local solutions to mitigate food shocks. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon surmised, “short-term relief must be linked to building long-term sustainability”.

In light of the Secretary-General’s statement, recent approaches to mitigate the cycles of droughts and floods in the HoA region have championed sustainability. Many organisations have worked on long-term solutions for
farmers and pastoralists for decades, and attention was refocused on community capacity building and permanent solutions in the wake of the 2011 food crisis. Kenya led an initiative to reenergise the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a body that was founded in 1986 to address recurring natural disasters, ecological degradation, economic development and food security in the region. Members include Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. In September 2011 IGAD hosted a food summit in Nairobi. At the conference, state governments renewed interest in sustainable solutions to food insecurity in a fourteen-point declaration. “The participants resolved to enhance partnership and shore up investments in short- and long-term drought/disaster preparedness interventions at the regional and national levels and to build sustained resilience of the vulnerable communities especially in the drylands”.

Food Crisis by Country

Djibouti

Djibouti has endured four consecutive years of drought since 2009. Rainfall has been irregular for six years. The dry conditions have progressively worsened food insecurity in a country ranked 147 out of 169 on the Human Development Index (HDI). Nearly eighty per cent of Djibouti’s citizens reside in urban areas. Less than one percent of land is arable due to an unfavourable climate, which means that crop production is perpetually low – it is a “food deficit” country. Ninety per cent of the population relies on food assistance or imported foodstuffs, global commodities that rose in 2012. Since 1980 Djibouti’s population has more than doubled and is expected to exceed one million people by 2025, causing additional strain on already limited resources. Finally, the country currently hosts more than 22,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia, further exacerbating the food crisis.

Pastoralism and poverty remain key elements of Djibouti’s food crisis, largely due to the limitations of agriculture in the country. WFP identifies extreme poverty as a primary threat to food security because the majority of the population is unemployed and cannot afford to purchase staples. Low education levels and a weak private sector limit opportunities for economic growth and increase the reliance on long-term food assistance. In addition to chronic poverty, pastoralism contributed to the food crisis. Most rural residents are pastoralists and heavily dependent on their livestock. Because they live in remote locations with poor transportation infrastructure, aid groups sometimes struggle to deliver emergency assistance. Even under normal conditions, the majority of households live below minimum calorie thresholds. Continual drought over the previous six years has resulted in a severe decline of livestock herds. Livestock mitigation and recovery education programmes would benefit the population, but are largely absent. According to FEWS NET, the “main underlying cause of chronic food insecurity is the inability to recover completely from shocks.” The result is increasing dependency on food aid by impoverished pastoralists in remote areas and unemployed citizens in urban centres.

Response

When much of the country met IPC Phase 3 and 4 conditions in the summer of 2011, an “acute food crisis” was declared and a number of international agencies responded with emergency food relief. In October 2011, WFP began a two-year, USD 33 million programme to assist vulnerable groups and refugee populations in Djibouti. The initiative provides immediate support to the poorest and most food insecure populations. It also seeks to build government and community capacity by increasing self-reliance among food insecure communities. Similarly, FAO is supporting a project with the Ministry of Agriculture to bolster local resiliencies by improving the self-reliance of small farms. It provides tools, training, and water pumps to 800 small gardens throughout Djibouti. Small-scale farming is seen as an alternative to industrial agriculture. The European Commission (EC) and other organisations have responded to the crisis with similar efforts. Many provide emergency food assistance coupled with long-term projects aimed at community-based solutions.

Djibouti intends to augment international emergency efforts with multi-year efforts that target foundational causes of food insecurity in the country. One proposal calls “to increase agricultural production through overseas farms established in Ethiopia and Sudan”. Government plans also include the creation of water reservoirs that can collect up to 10-20 million cubic metres of rain to be used during the dry season. According to President Ismail Omar Guelleh, indigenous drought resistant plants could possibly be used as animal feed “when pasture is low or non-

3 The Human Development Index (HDI) is an important publication on livelihoods produced annually by the UN Development Programme (UNDP)
existent”. This initiative could alleviate some of the struggles for pastoralists who must maintain herds on land that is often unsuitable for grazing.

**Forecast**

According to WFP emergency food security assessment (EFSA), 42 per cent of the rural population remained “food insecure” in 2011. In September 2012, USAID reported that food security is improving in rural parts of the country; however, the cost to import food is expected to increase due to Ethiopia’s restriction on exports, also a result of the regional drought.

The FEWS NET 2012 countrywide outlook forecasts large-scale reliance on food assistance with many, if not most, households remaining vulnerable to food shocks until at least January 2013. The entire country will remain in IPC Phase 2 (“stressed”), except for the Ali Sabieh region, a south-eastern pastoral community, which will remain at Phase 3 (“crisis”) through December 2012. WFP identified three persistent threats to food security in addition to drought and food prices: extreme poverty, scarcity in arable land and low levels of education. These problems are chronic and food security remains a looming threat until these core issues are addressed.

**Ethiopia**

Africa’s second most populous country experienced a total of 21 floods and droughts between 1983 and 2012, continually threatening food security. The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (IFRC) labels Ethiopia as one of the most disaster prone countries in the world, affected by both severe drought and destructive floods. Over the last decade, the average number of Ethiopians in need of food assistance fluctuated between 3 million and 14 million (between three and fifteen per cent of the population). According to the World Bank, about fourteen per cent of land in Ethiopia is arable. In addition to sporadic rainfall, the World Bank reports that water shortages in the south-eastern and northern regions result from water-intensive farming and poor management; 72 per cent of the urban population and only 15 per cent of the rural population have access to potable water. Vulnerable communities regularly struggle to provide sufficient food for their families during the lean seasons from January – April and June – September.

Subsistence agriculture is mostly rain-fed. Crops make up more than half of the agriculture output and include cereals and pulses. Livestock accounts for about one-third of the agriculture sector. It is estimated that Ethiopia has the largest livestock population in Africa but increased demands for land and livestock have contributed to environmental degradation such as soil erosion and desertification. Periods of food insecurity are exacerbated by Ethiopia’s high population growth rate. Between 1980 and 2012, Ethiopia’s population grew from about 36 million to over 91 million, with expectations it will exceed 131 million by 2025. Last year marked the country’s eighth consecutive year of rapid growth, although it remains one of the poorest countries on the continent. High food prices pose significant barriers to vulnerable households that need to purchase food.

The absence of land rights and state-dominated markets play significant roles in the recurrence of Ethiopian food crises. Despite the fact that agriculture accounts for 41 per cent of GDP and 85 per cent of total employment, private ownership of land is not a legal right in the country. “Additionally, agricultural market dysfunctions are common in Ethiopia. Throughout history, the state has controlled markets...Each time a food crisis occurs, there is a complex interaction of supply, distribution, and demand factors”. This complex array of factors makes Ethiopia especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the price of food staples. Beginning in 2008, the government started to allocate 3.6 million hectares of land to local and foreign investors for large-scale commercial farming. This policy raised controversy for two reasons. First, it proved to have an adverse impact on the environment, especially with regard to deforestation. Second, human rights groups alleged that thousands of residents were forcefully resettled. The government promised to halt resettlement in March 2012, but the issue remains contentious and has stoked fears throughout rural communities. The agriculture sector is a cornerstone of Ethiopia’s economy and workforce. However, the country is “only able to produce seventy per cent of its food requirements”. The complex dynamics between politics, economics, and ecology have left Ethiopians especially vulnerable to food crises for the last forty years.

Most recently, the 2010-2011 drought necessitated emergency assistance for 4.6 million people. Among the hardest hit were residents in the north-eastern Afar and Somali regions who are largely dependent on crop production,
but were at the epicentre of drought conditions. Southern and south-eastern pastoralists and “agropastoralists” (subsistence farmers who maintain herds) were also vulnerable to the dry conditions. By September 2011 most of the region met Phase 4 (“emergency”) conditions on the IPC scale. Emergency food assistance provided short-term relief, but as of August 2012, the majority of the population in these territories was at considerable risk in Phase 3 (“crisis”) and some remained at Phase 4.

**Response**

Prior to 1990, Ethiopia had one of the world’s highest death rates, largely due to recurring droughts and wide-scale malnutrition. With the onset of drought in 2010, response efforts were mobilised to prevent a similar catastrophe. Over USD 462 million was contributed to the country in 2011-2012, according to the UN OCHA financial tracking service. In addition, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) broke with the tradition that caps emergency allocation to USD 30 million and contributed USD 46 million to Ethiopia in 2011, making it the second largest recipient of aid that year (Somalia received USD 50 million in CERF funds). This allowed local NGOs supported by organizations like Oxfam to implement high-impact projects designed to provide emergency relief.

Efforts to deliver water by truck to remote communities were initiated alongside projects to repair boreholes – crucial in a country with little infrastructure. Emergency cash transfers were also provided alongside cash-for-work programmes. Long-term projects designed to address underlying drivers of food insecurity were also implemented. These included trainings on community-managed water committees and animal health initiatives. Despite their successes, critics warned that less than five per cent of donor funds were used for long-term development.

Ethiopia stands out from other recipients of foreign aid for undertaking one of the most substantial long-term projects aimed at mitigating chronic causes of food insecurity. In 2004, Ethiopia announced the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP). The PSNP is the largest social protection programme on the continent, after South Africa’s. The programme receives funding from the World Bank, DFID, USAID, European Commission, WFP, and aid agencies in Ireland, Sweden and Canada. According to the World Bank, the programme “aims to shift away from a focus on short-term food needs met through emergency relief to addressing the underlying causes of household food insecurity”. Specific projects under the programme target extreme hunger, malnutrition, soil and water conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices. The PSNP has been lauded for building resilience and bolstering sustainable community assets.

**Forecast**

Cyclical droughts will continue to affect the Ethiopian climate, and the country has made strides in recent years to expand agricultural initiatives that will reinforce local resiliencies in the face of anticipated hardships. Ethiopia’s Five Year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) for 2011-2015 focuses on enhancing productivity of small farmers and pastoralists. Plans to reduce poverty are supported by the World Bank, which endorsed the new Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) in September 2012 with interest-free credits of USD 1.15 billion. In a partnership with the state government, the project seeks to improve service delivery of crop yields, as well as transportation and agriculture infrastructure, to provide long-term stability for local markets.

More immediately, FEWS NET pegs the likelihood of improved conditions to sustained humanitarian assistance through December 2012. Almost four million citizens will require emergency assistance through the end of the year. Additionally, prices for food staples have escalated in recent months. At present, most of the country remains in IPC Phase 3 (“crisis”). The Humanitarian Requirements Document (HRD) is a joint document compiled annually by international donors and the Ethiopian government to outline humanitarian assistance needs; the revised document for 2012 requests an additional USD 189 million to carry out emergency food activities through the end of 2012.
Kenya

The UN classifies Kenya as a food-deficit country exacerbated by recurring cycles of droughts and floods. In the past fifteen years the country has seen a series of droughts, and the short gaps between dry seasons have prevented large-scale recovery. Cycles of drought have amplified food insecurity and in 2011, 3.75 million Kenyans required food assistance. Of these, 1.4 million citizens, residing mostly in the North, were classified as IPC Phase 4 (“emergency”). Livestock were decimated, and affected households still struggle to rebuild herds to previous levels.

Like other states affected by the HoA drought, poverty and low levels of development have contributed to the food crisis. Although Kenya has the largest economy in east Africa and a literacy rate of 87 per cent, it also bears a high unemployment rate and most of its population lives below the poverty level of USD 1 per day. Population growth severely strains local resources. Between 1980 and 2012, Kenya’s population swelled from about 16.3 million to over 43 million, and is expected to exceed 53 million by 2025. The child mortality rate for under-five year olds has steadily declined in the last few decades, but remains one of the highest in the region. More than seventy per cent of Kenyans work in the agriculture sector, mainly as subsistence farmers, making them particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. According to the World Bank, less than ten per cent of land in Kenya is arable, despite the fact that 48 per cent of total land is suitable for agriculture, an indicator of how undeveloped the agriculture sector remains.

In addition to poverty and drought, Kenya also struggles to deal with environmental degradation and a clean water shortage, both of which contributed to the food crisis and complicate long-term recovery efforts. Soil erosion, deforestation and water pollution are the most prevalent environmental concerns. Deforestation has also contributed to drought spells, in particular the endangered Mau forest, which will store rain during the wet season, releasing it during the dry months. In a country where water is scarce, pollution contaminates already deficient supplies and expensive purification costs are imposed on downstream users. A 2006 UN Water Report identified the most common causes of pollution that contaminate water supplies; they include activities related to agriculture, urbanisation, industry, mining, and the use of fertilizer and pesticides. The Kenyan government is working to improve the water quality and prevent pollution. In 2007, it formulated the environmental sanitation and hygiene policy; however, it is unclear to what extent the policy has been enforced.

Finally, rising fuel costs and inflation undermine local purchasing power which contributed to the crisis in Kenya. Although the majority of Kenyans rely on pastoralism and subsistence agriculture, as much as thirty per cent of the population participates in a middle class economy, accessing markets and purchasing food supplies. In 2011, inflation rates grew to 18.9 per cent and cereal prices increased 100 per cent from the previous five-year average. The spiking prices and inflation rates had significant impact on middle class groups and crippled vulnerable communities in urban centres that regularly purchased supplemental food.

Response

Over 100 per cent of the food aid requested by the UN to support Kenya’s hardest hit population was provided within six months of the appeal. Therefore, emergency food needs were met throughout most of the crisis; however, funding for sanitation, hygiene, and livestock assistance received less than thirty per cent of the requested funding as of July 2011. Many NGOs focused relief efforts on the massive Dadaab camp, which hosts approximately half a million IDPs and Somali refugees. Government leaders extended support to an array of international organisations and established an emergency food pipeline and local food distribution centres.

More so than any other country in the HoA region, Kenya possesses the institutional capacity, economic capability, and the necessary infrastructure to succeed at long-term resilience-building that intends to break the man-made cycles of famine and reliance on food assistance. In the wake of the crisis, international support galvanised around efforts to establish Kenya as a model country in the region to break the “endless cycle of crisis-relief-crisis.” Currently, Japan leads several projects that focus on long-term pasture regeneration and the on-going water shortage. Most significantly, the government led a regional initiative to establish a summit on the HoA crisis in September 2011. The event, called Ending Drought Emergencies in the Horn of Africa, was held in Nairobi and sought sustainable solutions to the recurring problem of drought.
**Forecast**

*Short rains* brought by El Niño between October and December 2012 are expected to help recover surface water late in 2012, improving pasture and sparking regeneration. At the same time, heavy rains could also prove detrimental if they cause flooding, displace communities and damage infrastructure. There is a risk that floods would also interrupt access to markets and further strain livelihood assets. According to Oxfam, “the level of preparedness for a mild El Niño event at community, county and national levels is poor” and could turn into another humanitarian crisis in the northern part of the country, which still has above emergency level malnutrition rates. On the whole, predictions for Kenya are better than other HoA countries affected by drought. According to a July 2012 *FEWS NET* report, many pastoralists remain at IPC Phase 2 (“stressed”), whereas population clusters in neighbouring countries remain at critical and emergency categories, Phases 3 and 4.

**Somalia**

Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world and was the hardest hit in the HoA region during the 2011 food crisis; 72 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population were directly affected by the crisis. In a given year, Somalia is only able to meet about half of its population’s cereal needs through domestic production. The 2010 drought created the driest conditions in Somalia in sixty years and cut the expected harvest yields by fifty per cent throughout the country. The drought also destroyed the livestock assets of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, one of the largest sectors of the country’s agriculture- and fishing-based economy. The loss of herds generates multi-year complications. Livestock are not recoverable in a single season and many farmers subsist on milk and sales from animal products to supplement poor harvests.

Drought, urbanisation, poor land use (overgrazing, deforestation), and the depletion of marine wildlife contribute to environmental degradation throughout the country. Environmental vulnerability perpetuates the poverty cycle and reduces the effectiveness of local resiliencies. Few coping strategies were available to impoverished residents when the drought began in late 2010. With the onset of famine, the crisis displaced thousands and caused a huge influx of refugees to spill into neighbouring countries, the majority entering Kenya. Currently, Somalia has generated the third highest number of refugees in the world. By September 2012, there were more than one million displaced Somalis spread throughout the HoA region. Another 1.5 million people are internally displaced, mainly living in congested settlements, without water and sanitation facilities, conditions that have worsened the humanitarian crisis.

After the declaration of famine in July 2011, funding within and outside the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) increased to unprecedented levels with the majority of money, USD 300 million, allocated to the food cluster. Because the funding response was so immediate, agencies were able to act quickly and deploy resources to mitigate the famine. However, al Shabaab banned humanitarian assistance delivered by the UN, the ICRC and international NGOs on 28 November 2011. The militant group argued the organisations were responsible for “financing, aiding, and abetting subversive groups seeking to destroy the basic tenets of the Islamic penal system”. The ban exemplifies two inter-related drivers of food insecurity in the country: cyclical violence and barriers to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The absence of a central government has resulted in a dearth of infrastructure throughout most of the country. Armed groups vie for control of Somali territory reinforcing low levels of economic growth, education, and civil unrest – all factors that undermine food security. Two decades of political instability and poor security created conditions that restricted humanitarian access and heightened the food crisis.

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4 Al Shabaab banned [WFP](http://www.wfp.org) in November 2009 claiming the UN agency depressed food prices for Somali farmers and sometimes distributed spoiled food that “caused people to fall ill”. The organisations banned in November 2011 included sixteen of the largest international food assistance NGOs and international agencies in the world.
Response

The response to famine in Somalia was successful in mitigating the most severe elements of the crisis. Alerts were issued by FEWS NET and the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAUA) in July 2011. Between July and September 2011, the number of individuals on the brink of starvation tripled. The UN requested USD 1.1 billion in a consolidated appeal, of which USD 777 million was funded by October 2012. During this time, an array of UN agencies, international donors and NGOs triaged the disaster. Although they were stalled or halted from operating in areas controlled by al Shabaab, international organisations had access to Somali territory that was not occupied by the militant group, which steadily lost ground during the food crisis.

WFP implemented a range of emergency food programmes aimed at women and children. The organisation also deployed “special operations” teams that delivered 207 metric tonnes of cargo to improve food delivery systems, repair critical infrastructure in Mogadishu and Bossaso, and increase Somali capabilities to import humanitarian supplies. In August 2012, OCHA and coordinating bodies delivered emergency food assistance to 1.5 million people. Nevertheless, 2.5 million people are still in Phase 3 (“crisis”) or Phase 4 (“emergency”) and OCHA estimates 1.3 million will remain at risk of returning to famine before January 2013 if emergency food assistance is not continued.

Forecast

Early response efforts partially eclipsed the famine, but food insecurity remains a critical problem in Somalia, and 2.12 million people are expected to remain food insecure through at least December 2012. This represents only a sixteen per cent decrease in the population that suffered an “acute food security crisis” at the start of the year. Two immediate factors will pose short-term challenges. Climate experts predict the country is at risk of floods in the coming months and staple food prices continue to climb. Additionally, the decrease of crops and livestock has left the population especially vulnerable. Oxfam indicated that women and children are the highest-risk populations. Indicators suggest that a public health disaster might accompany the current food crisis as rates of malnutrition and infectious disease rise. Both are trademarks of food insecurity and the IDP camps which are common throughout the country.

Southern Somalia, particularly Gedo, Lower Juba, and Bakool, represent the worst affected areas. Emergency food assistance is still being delivered and remains critical if the region is to avoid another famine. Additionally, all IDP settlements in the country remain in IPC Phase 4 (“emergency”) classification. Food stockpiles might increase with the January 2013 harvest and a moderate El Niño is expected to improve yields. Even with a strong harvest, experts warn that damages to livestock from the current crisis cannot be overcome in a single season and food assistance will be required to prevent several million Somalis from suffering more acute symptoms of the waning emergency.

Conclusion

While droughts and floods occur in other parts of the world, the frequent recurrence in the HoA makes it difficult for the affected population to recuperate from the shocks of crop failure, loss of livestock, and food shortages. A range of factors that include security, poverty, economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and low levels of infrastructure, compounds the food shortages that are precipitated by cycles of floods and drought. As ICRC indicates, the region suffers from an “endless cycle of crisis-relief-crisis”.

It is asserted by some that famine can be prevented, even in regions susceptible to regular drought. “In today’s 21st-century world, just about everything about famine is manmade”, according to Robert Paarlberg, an adjunct professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. The action or inaction of governments affected by natural disasters and the international community largely determines whether a food crisis emerges. Since the devastating 2011 crisis, food security has improved in the region. However, as of July 2012 more than nine million people were still in need of humanitarian assistance. The weather phenomenon El Niño is expected to cause normal to above seasonal rains through December 2012. Favourable conditions should improve the food security outlook for the first six months of 2013. Afterwards, regional organisations such as IGAD and members of the international community, including various UN agencies, will help determine the success of strengthening community capacity to mitigate recurring cycles of drought and floods.