Saving lives, livelihoods and ways of life in the Horn of Africa

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A crisis with many faces

A total of 13.3 million people, half of them children, urgently need humanitarian assistance in the countries of the Horn of Africa – up from 12.4 million in August. They face a triple shock caused by the worst drought in decades, soaring food prices and on-going conflict and insecurity in Somalia.

Across the Horn, more than 320,000 children under five are severely malnourished and at imminent risk of death. The situation is most dire in Central South Somalia, where tens of thousands have died since the beginning of this year. Child survival is also threatened among the Somali refugees who continue crossing the border into Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, as well as among the affected host communities in these countries.

- In Somalia, 4 million people are affected by food insecurity, 300,000 more than in July. In the six famine-declared areas in the south, 750,000 people, including 160,000 severely malnourished children, are at risk of death.

- In Kenya, the refugee population in the camps around Dadaab has risen to over 450,000, including 100,000 who arrived since 1 June. Almost 60 per cent are children. More than 1.7 million children in the north and east of the country are also affected.

- In Ethiopia, almost 160,000 children are projected to suffer from severe malnutrition by the end of the year.

- In Djibouti, some 23,000 malnourished children needed treatment between July and September, including almost 5,000

Inaction is not an option

The crisis in the Horn of Africa is complex and multi-layered. It has brought suffering to millions and imposed new pressures on communities already straining to cope.

At the heart of the crisis are children and women – always the most vulnerable in any emergency. Weakened by malnutrition, threatened by disease, left exposed to danger, they are UNICEF’s top priority.

In pastoralist communities across the Horn, drought and conflict also threaten ways of life that have endured for centuries. Our challenge is to help preserve them for future generations, while we address people’s immediate needs and save as many lives as possible right now.

Thanks to the generosity of many around the world – governments, NGOs, businesses and individuals – we can address some of the most urgent needs. But much more has to be done. We must go the extra mile to reach as many children and women as possible, wherever they are.

We also must redouble our efforts, with partners and communities, to find lasting solutions to the crises that the Horn of Africa faces on a regular basis. We cannot and will not turn away from these challenges.

Inaction is not an option.

Elhadj As Sy, Regional Director
UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa

A journey of survival

Aden, 3, arrived at Hagadera refugee camp in Dadaab, northeastern Kenya, with his father and brothers in early August. After a 25-day walk from Somalia, during which his mother died, Aden was severely malnourished, suffering from dehydration, vomiting and diarrhoea. Doctors at the UNICEF-supported stabilization centre gave him a 50 per cent chance of survival.

A month of treatment followed, during which his father never left his side. And then, as in many cases of children who make it to the camps, a transformation occurred. Aden is now healthy and rarely leaves his father’s side. This is what UNICEF’s work is all about: saving lives now, while striving to ensure a better future.
Key messages

This year’s severe drought in the Horn of Africa, combined with soaring food prices and the conflict in Somalia, has caused famine in some Somali regions and taken a staggering toll on children.

Over 300,000 children across the Horn are so severely malnourished that they are at risk of starvation unless humanitarian assistance is further scaled up, rapidly and significantly.

More than half of all severely malnourished children in the Horn of Africa live in Central South Somalia, where humanitarian access is limited. Child survival is also threatened in the drought-affected areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, and among the thousands of Somali families who continue trekking for weeks to refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Generous contributions from donors and partners have enabled UNICEF to scale up its programmes in order to reach children in need, wherever they are, and save lives. Nutrition, health, water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, as well as protection and education programmes, are showing results.

Weather forecasts for the October-to-December rainy season indicate that conditions may improve in Kenya and Ethiopia. In Somalia, however, the situation is likely to worsen beyond the six areas that have already been declared famine zones.

Although seasonal rains are eagerly anticipated after prolonged drought, they will increase the risk of flooding and deadly diseases such as cholera, malaria and pneumonia.

The child survival crisis in the Horn of Africa is far from over. It will most likely continue well into 2012, demanding even greater relief efforts.

Government-led investment in drought mitigation at the community level has averted an even worse crisis in parts of the Horn of Africa. More such efforts are needed alongside continued life-saving aid. And much more must be done – by UNICEF, governments, UN agencies, NGOs, donors and other partners – to sustain and expand the crisis response, especially in Somalia, where the situation continues to deteriorate. The coming months will be decisive.

The ‘triple shock’ that has led to a humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa

DROUGHT: The Horn of Africa is suffering from the effects of the region’s worst drought in decades.

In Somalia, harsh drought has led to the lowest cereal crop in 17 years – with a harvest output that reached only 32 per cent of the 2006-to-2010 average – as well as depletion of livestock, rising food prices and deteriorating purchasing power for the population. Even before the escalation of the crisis, Somalia had the highest child mortality rate in the world, with more than 1 in 6 children dying before their fifth birthday. Now, the level of severe malnutrition is on the rise, placing more children at risk.

In Kenya, failed rains in consecutive seasons have eroded pastoralist communities’ ability to cope and recover from poor harvests. This has worsened food insecurity and water shortages, and increased the risk of human and livestock disease outbreaks.

In Ethiopia, the failed seasonal rains of October-December 2010 in the southern and south-eastern regions were followed by poor belg seasonal rains from February to May 2011. In these areas, as well as in others, the late, inadequate and uneven rains have adversely affected food security.

RISING FOOD PRICES: The prices of food staples in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti have risen to record highs in the past year, more than triple the 2010 levels in some cases. Although food is available in markets across the Horn of Africa, impoverished households cannot afford it, due to depletion of their crops, livestock and income.

INSECURITY AND CONFLICT: Armed conflict in the Horn of Africa – as elsewhere – exacerbates the impact of drought, creates flows of refugees and internally displaced persons, limits humanitarian access and endangers aid workers. Somalia has been affected by conflict since the fall of its last government in 1991, with rapidly changing dynamics over the past year. As a result of both the conflict and the drought, there are now hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees in neighbouring countries – mainly Kenya and Ethiopia. At the same time, pastoralists in Kenya and Ethiopia are often caught up in local conflicts over resources and livestock movements.
Delivering for children and families

UNICEF has mounted an exceptional response to the unprecedented crisis in the Horn of Africa thanks to strong support from donors and partners, and because emergency programmes were already operating in all of the affected countries.

Access to Central South Somalia – the epicentre of the crisis – is difficult and can be dangerous. UNICEF has been in the country for 40 years and never stopped working in the south.

Three months on from the declaration of famine in parts of Somalia, and UNICEF’s activation of its Corporate Emergency Procedure, the scaled-up humanitarian response is demonstrating initial results across the Horn of Africa, including:

- 9,740 metric tonnes of life-saving UNICEF supplies delivered by air, land and sea routes.
- 108,000 children with severe acute malnutrition treated through therapeutic feeding.
- 1.2 million children vaccinated against measles.
- 2.2 million people provided with access to safe water or improved water sources.
- 48,000 children accessing Child Friendly Spaces or other safe environments.

Totals are for the period from 1 July through 30 September, though some country results are only through 30 August because of national reporting systems.

**Populations affected by the crisis in the Horn of Africa**

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs):** About 170,000 people in Somalia (100,000 of them in Mogadishu) have been internally displaced since January due to conflict and drought, bringing the total number of IDPs to almost 1.5 million. In central and southern Somalia, most of the displaced are children and women; in the northern regions of Puntland and Somaliland, most are men. It is critical to ensure that those who have remained in Somalia – and those who decide to return to their places of origin in the country – have access to essential services and support.

**REFUGEES:** There are more than 842,000 refugees in need of humanitarian assistance in the Horn of Africa, mostly from Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia – including over 100,000 who have fled from Somalia into north-eastern Kenya since June. Large numbers of refugees have also crossed over the borders into Ethiopia and Djibouti in search of assistance. Refugees from Somalia, especially, have arrived in poor physical condition, requiring urgent medical and nutritional support.

In Kenya, the Dadaab refugee camps, built for 90,000 people, now shelter 450,000. At Dollo Ado and other camps in Ethiopia, there are now some 280,000 refugees. In Djibouti, the main refugee camp at Ali Ade, intended for 7,000 people, is accommodating nearly 20,000.

**DROUGHT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES:** The impact of drought in Somalia continues to be intensified by the conflict there. Across the famine-stricken south, an estimated 336,000 children under five are acutely malnourished, nearly half of them so severely that they could die within weeks if humanitarian aid does not reach them. In some areas, more than half of all children under five, and a significant number of older children, are acutely malnourished.

In Kenya, 3.75 million people in local communities are in need of humanitarian assistance. Most are in the north, including Turkana, where up to 37 per cent of children under five are malnourished, as well as Wajir, Mandera, Isiolo, Marsabit, West Pokot and Moyale. Due to repeated poor rains, pastoralists have not been able to rebuild their stock.

In Ethiopia, the late arrival of the May rains this year extended the annual lean season in the central and southern highlands, and more than 4.5 million Ethiopians – including 650,000 children under five – are in need of assistance.

In Djibouti, four consecutive poor rainy seasons have devastated livestock holdings, withered local livelihood systems and left 120,000 people in need of humanitarian aid.
Results for children throughout the Horn of Africa

With its track record and continuous presence in all the countries in the Horn of Africa, UNICEF has been uniquely positioned to respond to the current crisis.

UNICEF has been in Somalia since 1972, including the central and southern regions, where it works through a network of local partners. This network has been critical to the recent scale-up of operations. In Kenya, where UNICEF has worked for 40 years, it has been responding to the effects of worsening drought since the end of 2010. Operations there have substantially expanded since July, both in local communities and in the massive Somali refugee settlement in Dadaab. In Ethiopia, where UNICEF has worked since 1952, government-led drought mitigation programmes have been operating for several years. In Djibouti, where UNICEF has worked for 20 years, its focus has been on improving coordination with the government and other partners, particularly on nutrition.

Given the recurring drought situation in the Horn of Africa, UNICEF has integrated disaster risk reduction and drought mitigation elements throughout its regular programmes. As a result, an even worse situation was averted in much of the Horn. With the rapid escalation of the crisis in mid-2011, UNICEF significantly stepped up its efforts in the affected countries.

Here is a snapshot of some of the results achieved to date in key programme areas.

Nutrition

In Somalia, almost 350,000 people have benefited from blanket supplementary feeding, in an innovative effort to prevent malnutrition by providing families with monthly food vouchers. Meanwhile, 30,000 households have been reached by a ‘wet-feeding’ programme providing cooked meals to Somali families in transit to refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia.

In the pastoralist areas of northern Kenya, UNICEF admitted almost 12,000 severely acutely malnourished children to therapeutic feeding centres in July and August. Another 33,000 children with moderate acute malnutrition received supplementary feeding.

In the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya’s north-east, UNICEF and its partners – working with the UN refugee agency – admitted 6,700 severely malnourished children to therapeutic feeding programmes and reached 11,700 moderately malnourished children with supplementary feeding in July and August.

In Ethiopia’s drought-affected regions, UNICEF supported the treatment of 54,600 severely malnourished children under five in July and August, working through the government’s Health Extension Programme. In the refugee complex at Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, UNICEF has supported the distribution of essential nutrition supplies and the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding.

In Djibouti, where the population is smaller but the proportional impact of the crisis is large, 4,500 children under five were being treated for severe malnutrition and 16,000 for moderate malnutrition at the end of September.

Health

In Central South Somalia, over 964,000 children have been immunized against measles, 426,000 have been vaccinated against polio, more than 900,000 have received vitamin A supplements and about 167,000 have received de-worming medication since July.

In Kenya, UNICEF has strengthened immunization coverage for children in drought-affected areas. To prevent disease outbreaks in the congested refugee camps of Dadaab and surrounding communities, over 170,000 children under five have been vaccinated against measles.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF has provided technical assistance and supplies in response to suspected outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea in drought-stricken regions. Meanwhile, 35,000 refugee children in Ethiopia have been vaccinated against measles since July.
In Djibouti, UNICEF supported a measles immunization drive reaching more than 3,100 children.

Water, sanitation and hygiene
In Central South Somalia, about 1 million people were accessing safe water through chlorination, water trucking, and construction or rehabilitation of water sources by the end of September. Nearly 56,000 had access to new sanitation facilities, and 171,000 had received hygiene and household water-treatment supplies.

In Kenya’s drought-affected regions, UNICEF and partners are now providing 1.13 million people with access to safe water or water sources. In addition, UNICEF has supported water and sanitation facilities in 172 schools, benefitting approximately 78,000 children. It is also providing refugees in Kenya with access to safe water while they are in transit, and once they have settled in camps and host communities.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF’s support for the rehabilitation and expansion of water sources – particularly in the Somali Region – has ensured a safe water supply for almost 280,000 people since July, including about 44,000 children under five. At the same time, water trucking is benefiting children and families at the refugee complex in Dollo Ado.

In the worst-affected areas of Djibouti, daily water trucking was reaching some 85,000 people by late September.

Education
In September, UNICEF supported the reopening of schools in Somalia with teacher incentives and textbook distribution, facilitating the enrolment of about 320,000 children in over 1,300 schools.

In drought-affected areas of Kenya, schools were kept open during the August holidays to ensure continued learning and allow 1.2 million children to receive one meal a day. In Dadaab, UNICEF has provided teaching and learning materials to enable refugee children to continue their education.

In Ethiopia’s drought-affected regions, UNICEF has provided education supplies to 28,000 children, about half of them girls, since July. Before the start of classes in October, UNICEF delivered tents and other supplies for child-friendly learning spaces serving 11,500 refugee children, plus education supplies for 20,000 children, in the Dollo Ado camps.

Protection
In Somalia, UNICEF is working with partners to support reintegration programmes for children associated with armed forces or groups – as well as non-formal education, vocational training, and psycho-social care and support.

In the Dadaab camps and surrounding areas in Kenya, almost 28,000 refugee children were benefitting from Child Friendly Spaces by the end of August. In response to reports of gender-based violence against refugee women and girls crossing from Somalia into north-eastern Kenya, UNICEF and partners have provided tented safe spaces in and around Dadaab, where they can receive services, information and support.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF has provided technical support to Save the Children-UK for reunification or alternative care benefitting more than 800 unaccompanied and separated children in refugee camps.

Crisis management in Ethiopia
Ethiopia is the country in the Horn of Africa with the largest number of people affected by drought and food insecurity, and in need of humanitarian aid. The country has been addressing the crisis through existing safety nets and preventive measures put in place by the government, with support from UNICEF and its partners.

UNICEF Ethiopia has responded to the effects of the current drought since November 2010. Government-led initiatives include expanding water trucking and strengthening the delivery system for ready-to-use therapeutic food, which is used to treat severe acute malnutrition through the country’s Health Extension Programme.

UNICEF is also supporting refugees whose health conditions are often acute, while alleviating the strain on host families and local communities near the refugee camps. Although support systems are stretched, the situation is manageable – provided that the necessary additional funding and resources are received.
On the horizon …

The immediate outlook for the Horn of Africa is worrying. Despite a massive infusion of humanitarian aid, immediate needs across the Horn outstrip even this high level of support. While many lives have been saved, tens of thousands of people – more than half of them children – have died. In Somalia, food stocks are expected to remain low in drought-affected areas. Famine could extend into new areas of the country by December.

Normal rainfall is forecast for much of the Horn of Africa for the rest of this year, and in many places the rains have already begun. But even if the October-to-December season brings sufficient rains, the positive impact will only be felt in 2012, after the next harvest. Meanwhile, malaria and measles epidemics are expected with the rains, which also bring an increased risk of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea outbreaks.

In Kenya, there are hopes that food security may improve with improved rainfall in agricultural areas. However, hundreds of thousands of refugees living in crowded conditions in the camps in the north-east of the country will face continued health risks. Protecting vulnerable refugees, especially women and girls, will be a high priority in the months ahead. So will ensuring unfettered humanitarian access to Central South Somalia, and reaching children at risk in communities throughout the Horn of Africa.

… and beyond

Over the years, UNICEF and its partners have made efforts to prevent hunger, famine and dependence in the Horn of Africa. Now there is a need for a concerted drive to build on those efforts, strengthening resilience in the countries most susceptible to drought, crop failure, displacement and insecurity.

UNICEF has extensively integrated disaster risk reduction in its regular programmes in the Horn. These include – among many other initiatives – supporting community management of water sources, maintaining nutritional surveillance to enable a faster response to spikes in malnutrition, and providing community-managed cash assistance to reduce the impact of sudden shocks for vulnerable families.

To build resilience, however, such approaches must proceed strategically. This means systematically assessing communities’ vulnerabilities in order to better identify risks from the outset – so that both immediate threats and the underlying causes can be addressed. It also means recognizing the importance of not only saving lives but also protecting livelihoods and long-established ways of life. To help bolster livelihoods (notably in pastoralist areas), support for reliable water supplies, family health and nutrition, relevant education and social safety nets will be critical.

Conflict resolution will be an integral part of resilience-building, as well. Location of key assets such as water points, for example, will have to be decided based upon conflict-free access to them, minimizing the chance of any particular community or tribal group staking a claim.

At the same time, national authorities will need support to enhance their early-warning systems and emergency-preparedness capacities, and both governments and donors will have to make a firm commitment to disaster risk reduction. Above all, the most effective approaches to building resilience will require the engagement and leadership of communities themselves.

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