From Food Insecurity to Food Security

Understanding human and food security implications for Somalia and the Horn of Africa

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Food insecurity in the Horn of Africa

Since mid-July 2011 the horn of Africa has captured the international headlines with one of the worst droughts in the last sixty years. The United Nations warned that the food crisis and human insecurity threatens the livelihood of 9.5 million people in the region. The ensuing famine killed tens of thousands in south and central Somalia, much of which is controlled by Islamist militants. About 2.3 million people, nearly a third of the population in southern Somalia, still struggle to meet food and other basic needs. Although the internally displaced people (IDPs) from Mogadishu, Afgoye, and Middle Shabelle, formerly classified by the UN agencies as “Famine” (IPC Phase 5 – Catastrophe), have now improved to “Emergency-level Food Insecurity” (IPC Phase 4 – Emergency)\(^1\), the progress is tenuous and the IDPs face the constant threat of imminent insecurity from factors beyond their control.

Following the extreme summer drought, the heavy rain season of fall 2011 created widespread flooding, cutting off much of the still-needed

1 The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification’s (IPC) is a tool for food security analysis and decision-support utilized by most aid and emergency international organizations. The IPC Acute Food Insecurity Reference Table for Household Groups is a standardized scale that integrates food security, nutrition, and livelihood information into a common classification of the severity of acute food insecurity outcomes, and can be used to highlight priority areas and populations in need of emergency response that have been identified based on food security analysis. See the detailed classification and ICP complete table here: http://www.fews.net/ml/en/info/pages/scale.aspx
aid for the drought-stricken regions in southern Somalia. The rains have led to outbreaks of malaria, cholera, and dengue fever and other waterborne diseases that threaten the lives of weak children. Combined, the mounting food related emergencies, crises, and escalating threat situations have raised international concerns for establishing cooperating mechanisms across governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental agencies that not only respond to famine but also ensure long-term food security.

The scale and impact of food insecurity in the horn of Africa is devastating. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other United Nations agencies, Somalia’s persisting food insecurity is due to a combination of conflict and human insecurity, limited access for humanitarian organizations, limited development programs, and lack of foreign investment. Somalia has suffered war on and off since 1991, destroying much of its economic and political infrastructure. In addition to violence, human and food security is undermined by land policies that restrict access to grassland areas for cattle. In spite of the various emergency responses, the horn of Africa remains one of the most food-insecure regions in the world; more than 40% of people are undernourished, and in Somalia the proportion rises to 70%. Somalia, along with other six countries in the region (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda), is an area prone to extreme food shortages. Each country has experienced at least one famine in each decade during the past 30 years. Even during non-drought periods and in spite their membership in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) these countries appear to not have enough food to meet their peoples' needs.

In Somalia, 20% of children die before their fifth birthday, and the nutritional status of women, who are the main assets for farming and family care, remains a grave concern. External factors such as drought, flood, or pest infestation can dramatically reduce food production, creating a disaster for the poorest communities. Farmers, pastoralists, and urban migrants are some of the most food-insecure groups. Farmers who live at subsistence level in the higher-rainfall areas experience food insecurity along 15–20 million pastoralists inhabiting arid and semi-arid lowlands. In times of floods or droughts, these communities not only go hungry but also lose their productive assets. Urban migrants, most of whom have fled poverty and violence in the countryside, live in extremely precarious conditions.

Multi-sector responses and integrated comprehensive approaches are needed to move the country from an unsecured food situation, extremely
dependent on humanitarian assistance, to a food security and human security situation.

The underlying causes of food insecurity
Food insecurity is clearly linked to agricultural production and development, but it also linked to poor food access caused poverty, conflict, and commodity speculation. The FAO’s State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011 highlights the how the poorest countries were most affected by the world food crisis of 2006–08. Food insecurity is not simply linked to poor productions but also to poor people’s inability to store food and rely on their reserves. Hence, development programs that focus on creating diverse and stable means of livelihoods can be central for the fight of food insecurity. However, the Horn of Africa and Somalia have two persisting obstacles to food insecurity: natural hazards and armed conflict.

The main natural hazard affecting the Horn of Africa is drought. Although large parts of Somalia are in a arid or semi–arid region, there is evidence to suggest that the climate is changing, generating more frequent and more severe droughts and floods. Somalia's ongoing civil war and other armed conflicts contribute significantly to food–insecure communities in the region. While armed conflicts always intensify hunger, the long–term effect of violence is creating communities that are reluctant to invest in agricultural development. At the same time, governments that should invest in development programs prefer to allocate their scarce resources to arms. This discourages foreign governments to invest in the country with poverty alleviation and other development programs.

Population growth has also been linked to food insecurity. The current population of the Horn of Africa (HOA), currently at over 100 millions, has doubled since 1974 and is expected to increase by 40% by 2015. The increase is putting intense pressure on scarce natural resources and has resulted in growing urban migration. Despite this, vulnerable people experiencing food insecurity live primarily in rural areas. They have little political leverage, live in scattered and difficult to reach areas, and are left to deal with extreme climate conditions and a fragile ecosystem.

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2 FAO’s State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011. Available at http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2330e/i2330e00.htm
The climate and ecosystem factors are accompanied by other factors like low producing agriculture, neglected pastoralism, weak technical knowledge, and poor infrastructure. These factors are exasperated by poor health, inadequate education, weak anti-poverty policies, and reduced aid and economic investments in the region. Only 2% of Somalia’s land area is classified as arable, significantly affecting the scale of agricultural production. According to FAO, “most of the poor are concentrated in the arid and semi-arid ecosystems and, as a result of population growth, have been forced to cultivate increasingly marginal land more intensively, with less opportunity to replenish the soil. Unsustainable exploitation of the fragile ecosystem has resulted in reduced biomass, biodiversity and water infiltration, and increased runoff and soil erosion. This exacerbates environmental degradation and low

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4 Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), Somalia Acute Food Insecurity Situation Overview - Rural Populations (3rd February 2012), Retrieved from http://www.fsnau.org/ipc/ipc-map
agricultural productivity, thereby contributing further to poverty and food insecurity.”

Somalia’s low–productivity agricultural sector is one of the worst in the worst, due largely to inadequate water control and limited irrigation. Even those farmers who benefit from reliable rainfall tend to lack the land, knowledge, financial wits, and access to markets that could multiply their efforts. The application of appropriate technologies for drought–prone areas has also been quite limited. Pastoralism production is a great asset for Somalia. However, governments and international organizations have made relatively few efforts to improve pastoral systems through feasible, regional, and sustainable projects.

People in rural Somalia rely on a narrow livelihood base – usually a small range of crops or small scale pastoralism – making them more vulnerable to violence, climate volatility, or economic shocks. Without proper irrigation, access to markets, or proper education, farmers have few possibilities to diversity their livelihoods or to branch out into other forms of employment. When men migrate seeking employment in cities or large farms, they leave women with additional work on the family farm and no greater level of food security. The liberalization of markets have produced uneven effects, primarily benefitting large scale farms but bringing very little benefits to resource–poor farmers. Although pastoralists have benefitted the most from liberalizing their exports to Gulf countries, a large scale systematic development for the country is yet to come, due partly to the pre–existing lack of adequate transportation and telecommunication infrastructure.

There has been a substantial decrease in official development assistance (ODA) for Somalia and other IGAD since 1990. Historical food aid assistance has tended to encourage a culture of dependence with very little investment on capacity building for sustainable agricultural production and food security. Most official development projects have been directed primarily to address emergency and relief interventions rather than to long–term development plans. In spite the international community’s attempts to link relief operations to development programs, the shortage of government funds has made these programs difficult to sustain.

**Understanding food security**
The right to food is a basic human right, and food security is central to human security. \(^6\) The Rome Declaration on Food Security (1996)

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\(^{5}\) FAO The elimination of food insecurity in the Horn of Africa. Food insecurity in the Horn of Africa. Retrieved from [http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X8530E/x8530e02.htm](http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X8530E/x8530e02.htm)
reaffirmed the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.

Poverty is a major cause of food insecurity and sustainable progress in poverty eradication is critical to improve access to food. Conflict, terrorism, corruption and environmental degradation also contribute significantly to food insecurity. Increased food production, including staple food, must be undertaken. This should happen within the framework of sustainable management of natural resources, elimination of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, and early stabilization of the world population. We acknowledge the fundamental contribution to food security by women, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, and the need to ensure equality between men and women. Revitalization of rural areas must also be a priority to enhance social stability and help redress the excessive rate of rural-urban migration confronting many countries [...]. Food should not be used as an instrument for political and economic pressure.7

The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offer two well-defined but interrelated definitions of food security. “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” 8 Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).” 9

The FAO definition highlights four main dimensions of food security: (1) The physical availability of food; (2) the economic and physical access to

food; (3) food utilization – with sufficient energy and nutrients; and (4) stability of the other three dimensions over time. Even if a person's food intake is adequate today, they are still considered to be food insecure if they have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, risking deterioration of their nutritional status.

Adverse weather conditions, political instability, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security status. For food security objectives to be realized, all four dimensions must be fulfilled simultaneously. In addition the classification of food security is in relation to the duration of food insecurity. That is, we could have chronic food insecurity (long-term or persistent), transitory food insecurity (short-term and temporary), or seasonal food security (recurrant, transitory, cyclical).

In a similar but more specific way, the Food Security & Nutrition Analysis System (FSNAS) bases its understanding of food, nutrition, and livelihood security on four key dimensions: Access, Availability, Utilization, and Stability. The FSNAU has developed an integrated, holistic concept and analytical tool for measuring food security in relation to its underpinning livelihoods analysis.

The first approach to food security centers on maximizing agricultural profits and production. The understanding of food security by westernized countries is that maximizing farmers’ profits is the surest way of maximizing agricultural production and therefore moving out from substance agriculture. The view is that increasing farmer’s capital will increase its access to appropriate technology (e.g. drip irrigation, greenhouses, double-cropping soil) designed to boost production.

The second approach to food security centers in human rights and social justice. This alternative understanding, often referred to as food justice, views food security as a basic human right. It’s based on the notion that global food production is sufficient to feed the world population and a fairer distribution of food, particularly grain crops, is a mean of ending chronic hunger and malnutrition. The core argument of food justice is the

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11 FSNAU believes that food security requires an analysis of livelihood strategies (e.g., food/income sources, expenditures, coping strategies), livelihood assets (human, financial, physical, natural, and social capital), integrated sectoral analysis, multiple scales of analysis including macro-, meso-, and intrahousehold-level dynamics, proximate to underlying causes, resistance, resilience and risk management. FSNAU Food Security Analysis System (FSNAS). Retrieved from http://www.fsnau.org/analytical-approach/fsnau-food-security-analysis-system-fsnas
belief that what is lacking is not food, but the political will to fairly distribute food regardless of the recipient’s ability to pay.\textsuperscript{12}

The third approach to food security centers on the notion of food sovereignty. Although it overlaps in many aspects with the food justice approach, this view sees food distribution less important than food resistance against the neocolonialism of multinational corporations. This view argues that multinational corporations have the financial resources and the political clout to convert local food resources for cash crops production for industrialized nations, while subsistence farmers are left to cultivate unproductive and marginal lands. Many indigenous and local communities claim food sovereignty in the attempt to preserve biodiversity, defend intellectual property rights and legitimizing indigenous ways of production.\textsuperscript{13}

**Recommendations for food security in Somalia**

The recent Somalia famine and the recurring food crises and emergencies in the Horn of Africa require a review of our approaches to secure food, and demand addressing food security as a component of human security. The emerging human security paradigm helps us to recognize Somalia not simply as a threat to traditional notions of national security and global stability (such as piracy). Instead, human security re-centers our possible solutions on hunger, poverty, and female empowerment to a people-centered and institutional capacity method. This integrated multi-disciplinary understanding of security involves development solutions, peace strategies, international relations, human rights, and anti-poverty.

According to the 1994 Human Development Report,\textsuperscript{14} human security integrates the fundamental human needs expressed as "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear." The report recognizes the centrality of food security in achieving these freedoms. Food security is intended as a basic need fulfilled by both physical and economic access to basic foods for all people at all times. However, effective food security policies and strategies must be integrated with other essential human security categories such as economic security (e.g. employment, access to markets, financial capital), political security (e.g. basic human rights), health security (e.g. protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles), environmental security (e.g. access to clean water resources), personal

\textsuperscript{12} The World Food Program (WFP) and Oxfam International are some of the organization proposing a food justice approach to food security. See [http://www.oxfamamerica.org/campaigns/food-justice](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/campaigns/food-justice)


security (e.g. violence and crime), and community security (e.g. traditional values without ethnic violence).  

There are important lessons learned from the recent Somalia famine. A triple failure in production, access, and response requires a tripartite systemic solution. The drought was not an instantaneous event but a two-year phenomena that caused dramatic production failure and food inflation. The food emergency in Somalia has become a permanent status that requires more than a temporary humanitarian solution. The access failure is particularly visible in the drought effects on pastoralists, killing up to 90% of their livestock assets in some areas. This has further diminished their purchasing power and creating significant economic distress in the already impoverished communities. The response failure has been largely due to the ongoing violence perpetrated by Islamic insurgents in the central and Southern regions. This has caused the withdrawal of several aid workers and the inability of humanitarian aid to reach those remote communities in Al–Shabab controlled areas. In addition, the ineffectiveness of aid has been the lack of governance capacity in tackling poverty by appropriate investments in social services and basic infrastructure. According to UN figures, $1 billion is required to meet immediate needs. So far, donors have committed less than $200 million, leaving an $800 million deficit.

We know the solutions for food security and we have the moral obligation to learn them and implement them. Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, instrumental in the formulation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has repeatedly stated that in the 21st Century, for the first time in human history, that we have the knowledge and capacity to eradicate famine. Somalia's failures indicate a three-fold solution at the production, access and response levels.

**First**, food production in the Horn of Africa must increase through appropriate investments in agricultural technologies supporting small–holder farmers and pastoralists. Distress times due to climate change can be mitigated through the cultivation of hardier crops, more affordable inputs, and capacity development for agricultural disaster risk management.

**Second**, we must increase access to food by alleviate rural poverty. International aid assistance and appropriate business investments must go to enhancing physical infrastructure (roads,
communications) and increase poor peoples' capacity to access markets and credits for small and medium enterprises.

Third, the response solutions need to shift from discretionary assistance to guaranteed social protection such as farmers insurance (micro–insurances and micro–savings). “A failed harvest can mean extreme financial hardship, inability to purchase farm inputs for the following season, hunger, and sometimes the difference between life and death. To protect against this, crop insurance not only provides a payout for poor farmers should there be drought, but with insurance they are able to access loans to purchase higher yield, drought–resistant seed and fertilizer.” 16

Emergency responses are necessary in times of famine. However, we need to reflect on the lessons learned and implement appropriate strategies, policies, and projects for preventing famine recurrence.17 The FAO, WFP and other UN agencies have showed the warning signs for famine and how the persisting lack of appropriate intervention make Somalia and much of the Horn of Africa a fertile ground for instability, hunger, extreme poverty, and human insecurity.

Feed the Future, the United States Government's global hunger and food security initiative, manifests a serious commitment to address the root causes of hunger and poverty and forge long–term solutions to chronic food insecurity. This Presidential Initiative is helping countries transform their own agriculture sectors to grow enough food sustainably to feed their people. It’s time for the United States government to address the issue of human insecurity in Somalia with a comprehensive approach as suggested in Feed the Future. Although United States armament assistance to the Somali National Army (SNA) may still be necessary, a human security approach needs to appropriately balance investment in other levels of capacity–building programs supporting country–owned processes and plans for improving food security and promoting transparency.18

Feed the Future suggests six paths for implementing effective strategies toward food security.

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First, it’s about promoting *Inclusive Agriculture Sector Growth* by unleashing the proven potential of small-scale agricultural producers to deliver results on a large scale.

Second, it’s about *Improved Nutrition*. The international community must promote and support country-owned programs to address the root causes of undernutrition.

Third, it’s about *Private Sector Engagement*. Governments and official development assistance alone cannot meet the Somalia food security challenge. These public–private partnerships need to extend to the third sector for implementing true "win–win–win" sustainable development initiatives centered on human capital development.

Fourth, it’s about *Research and Capacity Building*. Investments in research are critical to sustainably enhancing agricultural productivity growth, but they also need to be balanced with global concerns for biodiversity and food sovereignty.

Fifth, it’s really about *Gender Integration*. Women’s contributions to food security through family care and agricultural production often go unrecognized. Despite their central role, women’s access to land and other key productive resources is very limited in Somalia. Investing in reducing gender inequality is critical to achieving food security in Somali, the region and in the world.

Sixth, it’s about *Environment-Sensitive Development*. Environmental degradation can irreversibly affect the sustainability of investments in agricultural development and food security. Growing desertification problems needs to be addressed globally for reducing the extent of under-nutrition, while promoting a more efficient water management and preserving the already limited grassland biome and arable lands. In this level a green development for Somalia will be highly beneficial at the agricultural and other food levels of production and distribution.

The USAID’s FWD campaign reminds us that the crisis in Horn of Africa is unlike any others killing, starving or displacing over 13 million people. The international community not only has the moral obligation to donate, participate, and get informed, but also the global and generational responsibility to learn the lessons from the crisis and actively engage across sectors to develop sustainable human security solutions to food insecurity in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.