

Eliminating food insecurity in the Horn of Africa



Working together on long-term solutions

UN Task Force's interim report on a Framework for Action

Recurring problems ravage the countries of the Horn of Africa. Poverty, natural disasters, poor governance and a debilitating series of violent conflicts have produced some of the world's highest levels of food insecurity. About 70 million people suffer from chronic food insecurity. The latest crisis, a drought following years of low rainfall, burdens 13 million people with acute food shortages and the threat of famine.

Long-term solutions are needed. At a meeting of the United Nations (UN) Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) in April 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the establishment of an Inter-agency Task Force on the UN Response to Long-term Food Security, Agricultural Development and Related Aspects in the Horn of Africa. The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Jacques Diouf, was appointed Chairperson.

The Inter-agency Task Force must now help the countries in the region – Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, and Uganda – to begin preparing country-specific action plans. These Country Action Plans must address the problems they face by fostering greater self-reliance.

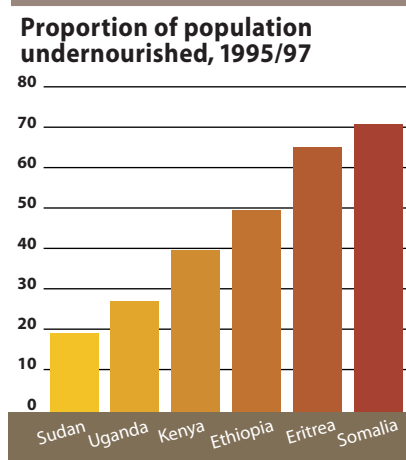


A collaborative effort will help the Horn of Africa countries avoid disasters like the famine that occurred 15 years ago. (FAO 10972, F.Mattioli, Ethiopia 1983)

Only in this way will governments be able to free themselves from dependence on external resources and restore basic human rights to their people – to have enough to eat, to be safe, to be treated equally.

With assistance from Task Force focal points in each agency, FAO is currently coordinating the preparation of a report that outlines the key elements of a Framework for Action. Governments, with the participation of all stakeholders and the help of donors, will then formulate Country Action Plans. The interim conclusions of this work and the main concepts are outlined in the following pages.

In a related initiative, responding to the immediate crisis, the Secretary-General nominated Catherine Bertini, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), as Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa. An assessment she made during a visit to the region in April has resulted in an interagency appeal for US\$378 million for emergency relief.



Source: State of Food Insecurity in the World, FAO, 1999

Who's hungry and why

The causes of food insecurity vary from country to country, but there are common elements

Although they are all in the same region, each of the countries in the Horn of Africa has unique problems arising from its own specific geography and traditions. In the highlands of Ethiopia, for example, intense population pressure forces farmers to cultivate small plots of land on steep slopes, resulting in soil degradation and low yields. In the arid lowlands of Somalia, on the other hand, the primary livelihood is livestock raising. Here, drought has left nomadic pastoralists with nowhere to go and their animals are dying. In semi-arid areas, growing competition pits pastoralists against cultivators.

Some elements affect all the countries:

■ Poverty

For 80 percent of the population, the only source of income is agriculture. More than half the people living in the region survive on less than \$1 each per day. Many people go hungry because they cannot produce their own food or afford to buy it.

■ Drought

Drought is all too familiar in the region. It can last several seasons and the recovery process is long. Besides creating acute food shortages, drought also causes food prices to rise.

■ Conflict

The region has long been devastated by conflict. This not only disrupts production, but also exacerbates the effects of drought, making relief operations both difficult and dangerous. Conflict also diverts energy, resources and efforts away from long-term development. It is tragic that countries suffering from poverty and hunger are diverting a high proportion of their budgets to military expenditures.

■ Poor economies

Although expanding, economic development in these countries is still insufficient



Some projects designed to improve productivity have reduced the ability of pastoralists to cope with drought. (FAO 10941, F. Mattioli, Kenya 1983)

to benefit the poor, and aid does not fill the gap. Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the region has declined by 40 percent over the last ten years and now stands at only \$15 per caput. In addition, these countries are resource-poor and heavily dependent on agriculture.

■ Failures in governance

The quality of governance in the region varies considerably. Weak government makes it difficult to provide effective relief during emergencies, or to lay the basis for sustained economic growth.

Some factors behind food insecurity are specific to rural areas:

■ Fragile ecosystems

For many of the people living in arid and semi-arid zones, the only practical livelihood is pastoralism. This makes them acutely vulnerable to natural disasters such as drought.

■ Poor water management

Less than one percent of the cultivable area in the region is irrigated, compared to 37 percent in Asia.

■ Low productivity

The region has some of the lowest productivity levels in the world, caused by unreliable rainfall and only limited use of improved farming techniques. Landholdings also tend to be small. Almost half of the farm households in Ethiopia, for example, cover areas of less than 0.5 hectares.

■ Lack of attention to pastoral systems

The importance of livestock systems in the region has been overlooked. Some projects, which were designed to increase productivity, have damaged the environment and reduced the ability of pastoralists to cope with drought.

■ Limited livelihood choices

Most of the poor people in the region depend entirely on agriculture, making them vulnerable to climatic shocks.

■ Weak infrastructure

With few roads and limited access to electricity or telecommunications, many farmers are isolated from the national economy.

■ Lack of inputs and agricultural services

Farmers in remote areas have not benefited from economic reform. They need help in securing information on improved farming techniques, better seeds, irrigation and access to credit and services. Only then will they be able to take advantage of the increased opportunities created by more liberalized markets.

■ Few social services

Health and education levels are very low, particularly in rural areas. In Ethiopia, primary school enrolment stands at 37 percent of the population, while in Somalia it is only 11 percent. Throughout the region, access to safe water supplies and sanitation is limited.

■ Slow response to alerts

Although effective early warning systems for impending crises are in place in most countries, government and donor response mechanisms are still slow.

What can be done

The Framework for Action includes three main areas that will need to be addressed in all Country Action Plans

Broadening rural livelihoods

■ Improving agriculture

The fact that most of the hungry live in rural areas means that improving agriculture will remain the principal way of solving food insecurity. A wide range of agricultural interventions will be useful in helping to feed the people and improve their lives. Such interventions include the introduction of drought-resistance crop varieties and the expansion of low-cost irrigation techniques. FAO's Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS), for example, uses some of these approaches.

■ Supporting pastoralists

The many people in the region who rely on animal raising need better access to such services as animal health and marketing.

■ Diversifying incomes

Farmers can broaden their range of livelihoods by investing more in small livestock, such as sheep and goats, in agricultural processing and in artisanal fisheries, all of which are promoted by SPFS. Education and skills training will be essential to increasing the opportunities outside agriculture, which is vital for future generations.

■ Safeguarding natural resources

Local communities are best qualified to protect their natural resources. This responsibility also has benefits, for example from ecotourism.

■ Improving marketing

In addition to better trade information, farmers require improved marketing infrastructure. In particular, pastoralists need stock routes and water points for moving their livestock.

Protecting the needy

■ Dealing with emergencies

Countries must be able to respond more quickly to the information generated by early warning systems. They also need to consider the size and location of strategic grain reserves, or set aside specific

budgets for grain purchase. Although the national and international response to emergencies is now more rapid, there is still room for improvement. A more collaborative effort in the smooth transition from emergency aid to long-term recovery is also essential.

■ Safety nets

There must be a shift away from free food distribution towards mechanisms such as food- or cash-for-work and systems for group savings and credit. Direct nutrition interventions are important but should be guided, for example, to schools and clinics in the poorest areas. Assistance should be closely integrated with community efforts to support vulnerable groups.

An enabling environment

■ Strengthening governance

Countries must invest in the core functions of government, support decentralization and assist the reinforcement of market-based policy reforms, including those related to trade. Legislative systems will need to be strengthened to ensure the rule of law and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes such as those over land and water rights. Governments will also have to create space for the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs).

■ Resolving conflict

Future activities will need to build on the efforts of governments to control the flow of arms and develop swift and effective forms of mediation.

■ Developing infrastructure

All the countries in the Horn of Africa need better transport, improved communication links using satellite technology and investment in irrigation. At the same time, governments have to strengthen public services overall, including those for the provision of basic social services such as health and education and national institutions, such as those for agricultural research.



For this woman in Ethiopia, making pottery offers an alternative livelihood. (FAO 20035, R. Jones, Ethiopia 1997)

Words into action

Once the Framework for Action is finalized, governments will need help translating it into Country Action Plans

The Framework for Action offers some of the possible elements of a long-term food security strategy. Governments must then formulate programmes that translate the Framework into an Action Plan appropriate for their needs. Such programmes should build on a local diagnosis of the problems and should involve the help of NGOs, CSOs and farmers' associations. The UN agencies, financing institutions and donors must do their part by providing capacity building and investment finance. Resources must be channelled towards areas that the beneficiaries consider worthwhile.

Using existing strategies

Many programmes directed towards increasing food security already exist in these countries, and poverty reduction strategies are being prepared in nations eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Governments and other stakeholders must be sure to take these existing programmes into account when they consider the overall

strategy. Support from multilateral and bilateral donors, UN agencies and international research centres will be crucial.

Making the strategy work

The overall strategy envisages a ten-year horizon that will be implemented in a series of phases, as new approaches are tested to ensure their effectiveness. Extensive consultations will be useful to guarantee high-quality programmes and projects that have widespread support. Success will depend on clear deadlines, along with strong systems for monitoring and evaluation.

Addressing regional issues

The Intergovernmental Agency on Development (IGAD) will play a crucial role in coordinating the regional elements of the overall strategy, such as trade and transboundary animal disease control. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) will be particularly important in its continued capacity to resolve conflicts and provide technical assistance.

Mobilizing resources

Substantial external funds will be needed in the Horn of Africa for years to come. There must, however, be a shift to long-term development. This will require careful coordination among the international financing institutions (the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD]), regional and subregional banks (the African

Development Bank [ADB], the Islamic Development Bank [IDB]) and bilateral donors. A consultative group meeting could be useful in this regard. In eligible countries, HIPC debt relief could provide substantial additional resources to support food security programmes.

Where we stand now

At a workshop in Rome, in June 2000, members of the ACC Horn of Africa Task Force broadly endorsed the proposed strategy and Framework for Action. A portfolio of specific programmes and projects that can address food security problems in a comprehensive way has now been assembled. These projects, which concern small-scale irrigation, natural resource management, rural roads, water supply, health service delivery, animal health, skills-oriented informal education and off-farm enterprise development, as well as programmes for capacity-building and governance, must be examined and then endorsed by governments, with the participation of NGOs and CSOs. Representatives from the ten UN agencies that make up the Task Force will be visiting each country in an effort to reach consensus on the main thrust of the Framework for Action and the way ahead for Country Action Plans. At the next session of the UN General Assembly, the final report will be submitted. In the meantime, the ACC Network for Rural Development and Food Security will continue to keep governments up to date on the Task Force's progress.

The ten members of the Horn of Africa Task Force

- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- World Bank
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

Timetable for the Task Force report

29 June	<i>ACC Horn of Africa Task Force Meeting in Geneva</i>
21 July – 12 August	<i>In-country consultations</i>
20 August – 10 September	<i>Finalization of report</i>
15 September	<i>Circulation of final draft report to ACC members</i>
30 September	<i>Submission of final report to the Secretary-General</i>
Last quarter, 2000	<i>Presentation of the final report to the General Assembly</i>

Horn of Africa Web site

An ACC Horn of Africa Task Force Web site has been set up to facilitate broad discussion of the issues:

www.accnetwork.net/hornofafrica



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