



Statement by FAO Regional Representative for Africa – Ms Maria Helena Semedo

25 August 2011

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Colleagues,

The situation in the Horn of Africa continues to be of grave concern. The famine declared in parts of southern Somalia threatens millions of people, while thousands are currently starving.

In preparation for today's conference, FAO organized two high-level meetings to both alert the international community to the severe crisis in the Horn of Africa and discuss ways forward in resolving the situation. These meetings, held at the request of the G20 Presidency, led to concrete recommendations for overcoming the crisis.

Without urgent interventions, the crisis will continue to deepen. However, the situation is not without a solution.

In fact, over the last decade, appropriate and effective solutions have been implemented by FAO and its development partners in collaboration with the governments of the regions.

Today, I would like to emphasize one message: "we know what to do".

There are success stories, examples of interventions that allow communities to manage drought. These are already being carried out in the region. But they must be scaled up and extended.

We have today in the region, early warning systems and vulnerability analysis systems such as the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. It was these systems that, in November 2010, alerted the international community to the drought, announced the impending crisis and, more recently, enabled the declaration of famine in parts of southern Somalia based on rigorous and objective criteria.

Now, in southern Somalia, we are working with drought-affected populations to rehabilitate thousands of kilometres of irrigation canals and hundreds of kilometres of feeder roads and infrastructure to ensure the availability of water for livestock and for crop production.

We must also assist the people of northeastern Kenya and southeastern Ethiopia and Djibouti who are simultaneously struggling to cope with the drought themselves and hosting large numbers of Somali refugees.

Secondly, I must emphasize that by helping to rebuild the sustainable livelihoods of crisis-affected populations, we are helping to save their lives.

We have to enhance our efforts to strengthen farmers' resilience to drought, which is not by any means a new phenomenon in the region, but the intensity and frequency of which are likely to increase in the future as a result of climate change.

It is equally vital that we provide urgent support to livestock producers, who represent a significant proportion of the population in the region and who, if they lose their animals, will lose their ability to survive. A large part of Somalia's population relies on livestock exports for their survival.

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FAO is currently implementing short-term measures to assist herders, including through feed support to animals in the form of multinutrient blocks and water assistance to prevent high levels of animal mortality; de-stocking, namely slaughtering animals to improve vulnerable households' access to meat and income from its sale; vaccination and treatment of livestock; working with communities to reduce disease; supporting cold chain systems; and strengthening surveillance and response to livestock diseases.

It is just as important to save the harvests. A farmer without the means to produce, without seeds, without agricultural inputs, has nothing.

The next planting season begins in just a few weeks (in September/October). It is essential that farmers receive quality, drought-tolerant seeds, as well as fertilizer and other production support, by the end of October to start their next production campaign.

We must also prepare now for the spring planting season, which is the most important season of the year. No harvests in the coming seasons will lead to a further deterioration in household food security. I can assure you that in a few months, if we cannot ensure January's harvests are realized, the situation will be much worse.

Finally, I must emphasize that the people of the Horn of Africa need us, need YOU. It is unacceptable that over 12 million people today risk starvation.

FAO has prepared a road map to resolve the crisis in the Horn of Africa based on the priorities I have just mentioned. This programme, although only funded at 35 percent today, has already started to effectively rebuild the livelihoods of drought-affected populations.

It is crucial that we receive funds before mid-September so we don't miss the rainy season and lose the next harvest. FAO still needs USD 103 million to meet urgent needs in the Horn of Africa.

The CAADP implementation process provide the most appropriate vision and framework for the medium- and long-term actions required to address the root causes of today's crisis.

The complexity of the required interventions requires multi-year funding and substantial investments which are currently lacking. Humanitarian and development actors must work together to develop a more coherent approach to funding and the appropriate response to this crisis.

The Horn of Africa region is home to 143 million people. 12 million of them are affected by drought today. We must ensure that this situation does not get worse, that the crisis does not deepen. Let's work together for a sustainable solution.

Thank you for your attention.