



THE PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK

On The World Bank & International Monetary Fund

Food Crisis in the Horn of Africa

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The Horn of Africa has been suffering from severe drought over the past months, which has escalated into acute shortages of food and conditions of malnutrition in notably the regions of southern and central Somalia, northern Kenya, south-eastern Ethiopia and Djibouti. The United Nations has declared a state of famine in five regions of southern and central Somalia, adding that around 3.2 million people – almost half of the Somali population – find themselves on the brink of starvation. The World Food Programme (WFP) has declared the crisis in the Horn of Africa to be the highest global humanitarian priority.

The limited or no rainfall over two consecutive years has been exacerbated by rising food and fuel prices worldwide: in Kenya, the price of maize has tripled, whilst in Somalia, the price of the local staple food sorghum has risen by 240% in just the last ten months. Action Contre La Faim (ACF) quotes the price of a 50kg bag of maize to cost the equivalent of 40€ in Mogadishu – as opposed to 5€ before the crisis. As cattle and livestock have been the first to perish, the local population has found itself unable to trade or shop at the markets, where the asking price for any remaining food on sale is too high to afford.

In Somalia, on-going violent conflict has aggravated the food shortage and prevented the initiation of any development programmes or international investment to soften the effects of the drought. Humanitarian aid access has been banned by Al-Shabaab, the militant Islamist group that controls much of southern Somalia since 2009. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that it cannot reach some 2.2 million people in need of urgent relief in Somalia, while UNHCR reports over 25% of Somalia's 7.5 million people to be displaced. The refugee migration has led to the establishment of several refugee camps along the borders of Kenya and Ethiopia, including the Dabaab camp, which has become the biggest refugee complex in the world. Mogadishu hosts several of the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Somalia. The harsh conditions are being compounded by disease outbreaks across the camps.

How did the situation develop this far in the Horn of Africa? UN agencies and international aid agencies monitoring the region, such as Oxfam and ACF, have issued alerts and appealed to the international community for increased emergency funding ever since last year. Yet the response is only coming now. The current conditions are not solely the result of a spell of drought that calls for international relief mobilisation. Structural deficiency and lack of long-term, integrated development projects and investments in the region are the underlying reasons for the inability of these communities to protect themselves against a crisis of this character: a crisis that emerged as an outcome of climate change, inflation, shortage of crops and livestock, high transport and fuel costs, immense poverty, corruption, bad governance and in many parts of the region, violent conflict.

The key to addressing the current crisis and possible future crises to come is adopting an integrated and sustainable approach to food security, poverty and climate change. This cannot be realised without improved governance, reduced levels of conflict and increased levels of investment in the region.

As highlighted by Robert B. Zoellick, President of the World Bank, *“immediate relief and recovery is the first priority(-).But ... long term solutions of economic recovery and drought resilience ... are key to re-establishing livelihoods and ensuring that droughts don’t take such a heavy human toll in the future”* . The first ever G20 agriculture ministers’ meeting was held in June and an action plan was set out for improving information sharing and data collection, in order to provide early warning systems and better international cooperation to deal with future food crises. This is a welcome step forward. A focus on developing strong regional capacities in disaster risk reduction and resilience is also crucial. More focus should in addition be placed on reducing deforestation and overgrazing, and on improving water conservation and irrigation systems. Support should be targeted for small farmers, providing them with tools, seeds, fertilisers and knowledge on how to boost and sustain rural livelihoods. On Monday 25 July, the World Bank pledged more than \$500 million towards long-term projects targeting drought resilience, as well as \$12 million in immediate assistance to drought victims. The Bank is also boosting its overall agriculture-related investment by almost double, reaching \$8 billion a year.

Emergency relief must continue, but action on a longer term approach can no longer be left on stand-by. In its 2011 focus, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB) has been raising awareness on precisely the interlinking issues that are now relevant to the crisis in East Africa: climate change, food security and good governance. Instead of treating these issues as separate, their interlinked nature should be recognised. Fortunately, from a global perspective, signs of optimism can be found in the current political focus on food security and agricultural development (as highlighted in the World Development Report of 2011, focusing on conflict, development and security).

What role can parliamentarians play in improving the current crisis and ensuring the ability to better prepare for such conditions in the future? This year, PNoWB has launched a new programme of Parliamentary Questions, by which parliamentarians worldwide are provided with one topical question to be put forward to their respective governments each month. So far, the questions have addressed the global rise in food prices, private sector development in Sub-Saharan Africa, and good governance. This is one way for parliamentarians to remain active on issues of utmost relevance and ensure that their governments react appropriately. This will hopefully also create a greater demand for increased transparency and accountability from the government. Members of parliament should also push for better and more climate-aware agricultural policies. The agricultural sector is more vulnerable to climate change than any other sector, and constitutes one third of GDP and three thirds of employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the regions prone to climate related crises often constitute the poorest as well. Members of parliament should actively lobby for increased awareness and cooperation with international organisations such as the World Bank, G20, and the UN.

Evidently, more investment in the region is necessary to successfully sustain long-term development. This necessitates increased attention towards improving the business climate and developing the private sector – a well-operating private sector can serve as a far better catalyst for poverty reduction and raising people’s standards of living than public programmes. In this context, MPs should also focus their efforts on ensuring their respective governments take steps towards improving their business climates and facilitating greater investments into local infrastructure sectors such as transport and electricity.

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