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## HORN OF AFRICA: NOT THE TIME TO LOOK AWAY

When famine was declared in Somalia in July, the world turned its attention to the crisis in the Horn of Africa. Since then, public and media attention has waned, despite the fact that the crisis is far from over. Food production in Somalia will not return to normal levels until the end of 2012 at the earliest. Rising insecurity inside Somalia and Kenya is impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid while greater numbers of Somalis are forced to flee violence and hunger. In the refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia, UN agencies and NGOs have responded well to meet the basic needs of hundreds of thousands of new refugees, but protection monitoring and programming remains weak. In Mogadishu, non-traditional donor countries have created much needed new streams of assistance. However, their inexperience in aid distribution and coordination is resulting in vast disparities in the delivery of aid. Informal and unmanaged Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) sites inside the capital have become breeding grounds for waterborne diseases. And throughout Somalia, ongoing violence, banditry, and food shortages have trapped people who have nothing left, and nowhere to flee.

### CRISIS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Severe drought and famine in the eastern Horn of Africa continues to affect over 13 million people, including several hundred thousand refugees who have fled south-central Somalia to seek refuge in Kenya and Ethiopia. The situation grows more complicated by the day as the onset of rains exacerbates the spread of disease in displacement camps and fighting within Somalia burdens vulnerable populations already suffering from hunger.

Aid workers throughout the region are working to address these critical needs in an environment of increasing insecurity. In Kenya and Somalia, the risk of kidnapping has increased and chronic violence limits staff movement and program delivery. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), seven major implementing partners critical to providing essential services are threatening to halt operations in Kenya if their security cannot be guaranteed.

It is in this volatile context that the international community is working to protect and support four distinctly vulnerable populations: the new refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia,

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. Government must actively engage in diplomacy with the Kenyan government to prioritize security inside Dadaab for aid workers and refugees by increasing the levels of policing in the camps and the surrounding areas.
- The U.S. Government should issue a general Office of Foreign Asset Control license that would be applicable to agencies funded by private donations or that receive funding from outside the U.S.
- UNHCR must allocate additional, permanent protection officers to monitor and respond to protection threats, including child safety issues and incidents of gender based violence in Dadaab (Kenya) and Dollo Ado (Ethiopia).
- UN OCHA must ensure that the “common minimum package” of goods and services to be delivered to IDPs inside Mogadishu includes bed nets and medical supplies for waterborne diseases, in addition to standard food and non-food items.

long-term refugees in Dadaab, internally displaced people in Mogadishu (formerly the source of many of the countries' refugees and IDPs), and civilian populations in need of immediate food assistance throughout the rest of south-central Somalia.

## **DADAAB (KENYA)**

Dadaab refugee camp in eastern Kenya has been operating for over 20 years. It is a complex with four refugee sites (Hagadera, Dagahale, Ifo, and Cambios). The camp was constructed in 1991 as a temporary site to hold a maximum of 90,000 refugees. The Government of Kenya, although a willing host to refugees for several decades, has long resisted the installation of more permanent infrastructure in Dadaab – including water and sewer systems. Further, very few educational, employment, or mobility options exist either inside the camp or in Kenyan society for the refugees who are unable to return to Somalia.

Even before the declaration of the famine, Dadaab was home to more than 350,000 refugees. The population has now ballooned to more than 463,500 people. The majority of new arrivals fled Somalia as a result of drought conditions that devastated the harvest and caused their livestock to die of starvation. Many families also sold animals and sold or mortgaged their land to pay for food. One recent arrival in Dadaab camp told RI researchers, “I never intended to leave Somalia, but...now I have nothing. There is nothing left to go back to.”

Although UNHCR has done well to accommodate the very basic survival needs of these new arrivals, its protection and child protection teams are vastly under-staffed. During RI's recent mission, UNHCR had a single Child Protection officer (on a three-month emergency rotation) to track and serve the needs of children in a camp of half a million people.

Protection monitoring has been further hampered by increasing levels of insecurity in Dadaab, where rape, sexual violence, and violence against children are already pervasive amid generalized violence and insecurity.

Theft has become common at distribution sites and other gathering points. Insufficient latrine and shower facilities have increased the vulnerability of women and girls, who are forced to venture into the forest where they face a heightened risk of sexual violence.

Conflict with the host community over land, firewood, and other resources has been exacerbated by the recent influx of refugees. Thousands of refugees remain in the outskirts of the camps. RI researchers spoke with one woman who

refused to be relocated to the new Ifo camp by UNHCR. She told us that stories of banditry and rape in the Ifo site convinced her to take her chances on the outskirts, where latrines, water, and services are scarce and security is precarious.

Security for aid workers is also poor and rapidly deteriorating. The recent spate of aid worker kidnappings and the November detonation of an improvised explosive device (IED) in Dadaab have resulted in the scaling back of non-essential humanitarian programs. Insecurity has also affected UNHCR's ability to interview and register new arrivals, and may compound the problem by contributing to the number of unregistered persons in the camp area.

On October 15th, in response to a spate of kidnappings inside its territory, the Kenyan government announced that it was sending two battalions to establish a 100 kilometer buffer zone between Somalia and Kenya. The operation had a stated objective of preventing additional refugees from crossing into Kenya and creating a space inside Somalia where aid could be delivered – a very public effort to staunch the flow of refugees into Kenyan territory.

The Kenyan operation has created heightened levels of insecurity in the border area that are exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. According to Raouf Mazou, deputy director of UNHCR's East Africa and Horn of Africa desk, the combination of the Kenyan intervention and the threat of aid organizations leaving Dadaab amounted to “a catastrophe... the situation is going to be unstable for some time, especially due to the deployment of Kenyan troops in Somalia.”

On December 6th, the Kenyan authorities announced they would be “re-hatting” their troops – in other words, bringing Kenya's operations within the scope of the UN-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The decision by the Kenyan cabinet to commit resources to AMISOM comes at a time when the government has not yet fulfilled its promises and responsibilities to maintain security for the refugees within its borders. In October, after many delays and promises, Kenya dispatched 100 additional police officers to patrol the camps, bringing the total number to just 225 for a population of nearly half a million.

Regular policing and the investigation of crimes committed in Dadaab will help to reduce instances of banditry and violence, restore humanitarian confidence, and allow for the resumption of desperately-needed humanitarian programs. Kenya must prioritize security inside Dadaab for aid workers and refugees, and also ensure that those who suffered violence and famine in Somalia are not further victimized in Dadaab.

## **DOLLO ADO (ETHIOPIA)**

The Dollo Ado refugee camps (Bokolmanyu, Melkadida, Kobe, Hilaweyn, and Bur Amino) sit very near the border with Somalia, in the Somali or “Ogaden” region of Ethiopia. Bokolmanyu and Melkadida have existed for about two years, but Kobe, Hilaweyn, and Bur Amino are new. The total population of the camps has doubled since July, to roughly 138,000 refugees.

The Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) represents the Ethiopian Government as both the government refugee agency and aid implementer. However, ARRA has been criticized for being weak in its implementation capacity and in coordination with agencies in the camps. One challenge has been the coordination of food donations in Dollo Ado. There, ARRA has allowed food drops in the camp without coordinating with other aid agencies, resulting in food dumping and spoilage outside storage warehouses due to lack of space.

As in Dadaab, UN agencies and non-government agencies (NGOs) in the Dollo Ado camps have successfully scaled up the provision of shelter, food, and non-food items like bedding and cooking materials. Nevertheless, major protection challenges persist, and rates of severe acute malnutrition in children (brought under control in October) are reportedly on the rise.

The majority of new arrivals in Dollo Ado are women and children, with men either remaining behind or moving back and forth across the border to tend to their remaining animals, work or guard land, or to participate in the fighting. The distance between camps and the large, sprawling nature of each site has created risks for women. Forced to walk long distances to collect food and water, they have been exposed to documented incidents of rape and looting. In particular, the collection of scarce firewood outside the camp sites has been a source of conflict between refugees and the local population, and women collecting firewood have been attacked. Despite ongoing efforts to provide fuel-efficient stoves to each household in the camps, UNHCR has acknowledged that the firewood issue remains unresolved.

New arrivals in Dollo Ado have increased since the Kenyan incursion made Dadaab largely inaccessible. However, the Ethiopian government has announced that it will mount its own military deployment – this one designed to support the Kenyan “stabilization” mission. This operation is likely to have the effect of forcing people to flee fighting, while cutting off access to the aid concentrated in Dollo Ado. UNCHR must strengthen its protection and child protection staff capacity in order to manage the protection chal-

lenges already present in the camps, as well as to prepare for changes in the security situation and monitor shifts and gaps in protection needs.

## **MOGADISHU (SOMALIA)**

The Somali capital, Mogadishu – where urban clashes were once a major source of refugees and IDPs – is now host to over 300 IDP sites and at least 370,000 IDPs. Most of the sites are informal and unmanaged, or rather “managed” by militia who loot aid and extort what little the IDPs have. Incidents of violence, banditry, and sexual violence are typical, although unreliable data makes the exact prevalence unclear. People on the verge of collapse from starvation and over-exertion continue to arrive at overstretched, under-resourced hospitals.

The capital is nominally under the control of AMISOM and forces loyal to Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government. However, Al Shabab’s reversion to more unpredictable, asymmetric tactics – demonstrated by the recent detonations of IEDs and suicide bombings – means that humanitarian access within Mogadishu remains severely constrained.

For years, UN staff and other international organizations have operated in Somalia by “remote control,” with operations headquartered in Nairobi. By and large, only local staff have operated inside Somalia, with international managers making short visits to the country. But in spite of the persistent insecurity, UN agencies have recently – and commendably – increased their capacity to deploy staff permanently inside the capital.

Positive changes are also underway to allow UN humanitarian agencies to decrease their dependence on AMISOM for security (an important step, since the AU force is not seen as a neutral party in the conflict). This will help to create space between the UN’s impartial humanitarian programs and the highly political and military engagement of the AMISOM forces.

In addition to basic food and shelter needs, Mogadishu’s displaced are at tremendous risk of medical epidemics like cholera and malaria as the short, end-of-year rainy season sets in. When RI researchers asked IDPs about their most pressing concerns, many cited the rains and the need for bed nets to keep out mosquitoes and guard against malaria.

Non-traditional donors (including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), operating increasingly under the coordination of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), have taken on a more active role in Mogadishu and enjoy greater flexibility of movement than

some of the larger traditional donors. However, they are new to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and are learning lessons – including safe delivery methods, consistency of supply, and basic minimum standards – as they go.

So far, the inexperience of non-traditional donors has led to inconsistent food deliveries and the unequal provision of assistance across IDP sites (a practice which, if it continues, could result in conflict within the IDP communities). In one graphic example, RI spoke with IDPs in a site established and managed by the Turkish Red Crescent. The site was well appointed (and apparently well managed), with good shelters and regular food distributions, as well as concrete fire pits and walkways. The neighboring site, within view, was managed by another non-traditional donor and composed of the kind of makeshift shelters common to Somali IDP and refugee sites. The residents of this site had only received sufficient plastic sheeting for half the shelters, and they had only received food one time in the months they had been residing there.

The UN, its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the OIC have taken steps to coordinate better – an effort that should be encouraged and supported by all donor states. They are also in the process of designing a common basic package of goods and services to be delivered uniformly across the IDP sites, but this is a slow and evolving process. Given the onset of the rainy season, overcrowded and largely unplanned sites, and lack of medical services, supplies targeted at the prevention of waterborne disease (such as bed nets and brine salt) should be prioritized within the common minimum aid package, in addition to food and other standard non-food items.

## **SOUTH-CENTRAL SOMALIA**

Roughly half of the people in need of food and other humanitarian assistance in Somalia reside outside the capital, often in remote parts of the country that are largely under Al Shabab control. Al Shabab, a group that appears on the U.S. State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, is a complex, often fragmented organization. Its attitude to external aid has ranged from cautious acceptance of operations to outright hostility, depending on the personalities involved and day-to-day shifts in the underlying conflict.

Aid continues to be looted by Al Shabab and other armed actors on its way to distribution points, and aid workers – including local Somali staff – are at constant risk of intimidation, violence, and kidnapping. There have also been reports of Al Shabab restricting the movement of people in search of assistance, and of the forcible return of starving

people to their villages in order to work the land during the rainy season.

Where humanitarian access can be negotiated it is typically granted one delivery at a time, and agreements made one day may not be respected the next. This level of uncertainty makes it very difficult for aid organizations to plan their operations or deliver assistance in the volumes required. This is particularly true since the end of November, when Al Shabab announced the expulsion from its territory of 16 aid organizations, including UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), and a number of large NGO implementing partners. The offices of UNICEF and WHO were occupied and looted shortly after this declaration.

Nevertheless, some organizations have managed to negotiate more-or-less consistent access through a combination of strong local staff presence, well-developed community ties and a history of work in the country. The onset of the end-of-year rains, coupled with intensive aid efforts (a combination of food deliveries, voucher programs, and cash transfer programs) have eased the crisis in some parts of the country. But the UN has estimated that 250,000 people continue to be at risk of imminent starvation in Somalia. Any reduction in the levels of assistance could plunge these regions back into a state of famine.

The U.S. government policy on humanitarian aid delivery inside Al Shabab-controlled areas of Somalia has been dominated by concerns over the diversion of resources to a terrorist organization. The net result has been the imposition of Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) legal restrictions on aid operations conducted with money originating from the United States or conducted by U.S. agencies or citizens.

These restrictions, and the threat of prosecution for diversion of aid, have created additional obstacles to scaling up food distribution in Al Shabab-controlled areas. Some recent modifications made by the Obama Administration waived the legal restrictions on programs wholly or partly funded by the U.S. government, despite the diversion risks. But the relaxed regulations do not extend these protections to activities funded by private foundations, private citizens, or other non-U.S. government donors (for example, European governments). The U.S. government should act now to issue a general OFAC license that would ease restrictions on agencies funded by private donations or non-U.S. sources.

*Erin A. Weir, Ariela Blätter, and RI President Michel Gabaudan assessed the humanitarian situation for Somali refugees and internally displaced people in the Horn of Africa in October 2011.*