

SOMALIA

Recommendations for Famine Relief and Prevention

Presented by START

Students Taking Action Response Team

Summary of Presentation

- Location of Somalia
- Basic facts on famine in Somalia as contributed by each team member:
 - Politician
 - Social Anthropologist
 - Economist/Community Planner
 - Medical Doctor
 - Agricultural Engineer/Scientist
- Team concerns and recommendations
- What sources were used



Bruce Brander/Photo Researchers, Inc.

Foreign governments set up feeding centers in Somalia, such as the one pictured, in order to help the Somali people overcome starvation.

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Somalia, Africa



Somalia is located in Eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, east of Ethiopia.

Famine in Somalia

Major Causes: War

- One major reason for famine in Somalia is the factional fighting that has consumed the continent of Africa.
 - As a result, many people are denied food simply because they are on the wrong side of a war.



United States troops were sent to Somalia in December 1992 to protect food and relief supplies and to help restore order in the country, which was ravaged by civil war. Here, a U.S. soldier opens a sack of food for the people.

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Facts on Famine in Somalia

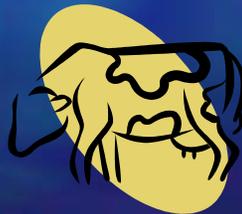
Major Causes: Weather

- A second major reason for famine in Somalia is weather conditions.
 - Somalia is largely desert, with sections that flood each year.
 - Many scientists believe that global warming is changing our weather patterns, and affects rainfall in crucial areas.
 - El Nino has contributed to severe flooding in Somalia.



Economic Concerns and Issues

- **Somalia has a very poor economic situation:**
 - Agriculture is very important
 - Livestock accounts for about 40% of GDP and 65% of export earnings, but some countries ban the import of Somali livestock.
 - Livestock, hides, fish, charcoal, and bananas are Somalia's principal exports, while sugar, sorghum, corn, qat (a mild narcotic), and machined goods are the principal imports.
 - Nomads and semi-nomads, who are dependent upon livestock for their livelihood, make up a large portion of the population.
 - Ongoing civil disturbances and clan rivalries have interfered with economic development and international aid arrangements.





Political Perspectives on Somalia

- Somalia's economic fortunes are being driven by its deep political divisions.

- There is lack of leadership



- There is no permanent national government; transitional, parliamentary national government
- Numerous clan and sub-clan factions are currently vying for power

- Beginning in 1993, a two-year UN humanitarian effort (primarily in the south) was able to alleviate famine conditions, but when the UN withdrew in 1995, having suffered significant casualties, order still had not been restored.





Anthropology's Contribution

- Civil war has been a fact of life in Somalia since 1977.
- Many people are illiterate and face other problems:
 - Only 38% of people are literate, and only 25% of women are literate.
 - Life expectancy is to 41; women have an average of 6 children.
 - Population counting in Somalia is complicated by large number of nomads and by refugee movements in response to famine and clan warfare.
- Family and community life is inconsistent:
 - Periodic crop failures and losses of livestock often occur when seasonal rains fail or when unusually heavy storms cause widespread flooding.
 - During such times, a family's emergency food supplies diminish rapidly, and hunger and starvation become commonplace until weather conditions improve and livestock herds are subsequently rejuvenated.
 - For centuries, this has been the general pattern of life.

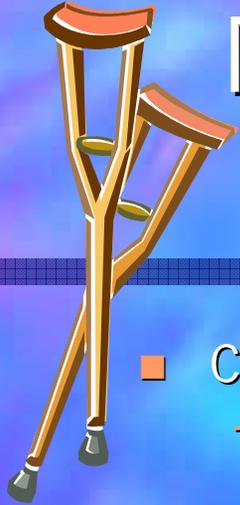
Science and Agricultural Weigh in With Additional Information



- There are negative agricultural conditions in Somalia:
 - Somalia is in Eastern Africa and is slightly smaller than Texas.
 - The land is desert - mostly flat, rising to hills in north.
 - Only 1.67% of land is arable, and only 2,000 sq km is irrigated.
 - Natural hazards include
 - recurring droughts
 - frequent dust storms over eastern plains in summer
 - floods during rainy season
 - Other problems that contribute to famine include:
 - use of contaminated water contributes to human health problems
 - deforestation and overgrazing
 - soil erosion and desertification



Medical Concerns are Also Problematic



- Casualties of civil war are extreme
 - Many people have lost limbs; no facilities exist to make prosthetic devices
- 200,000 people are living in displaced persons camps, where conditions are reported as severe: high levels of malnutrition and near starvation; widespread skin and gastro-intestinal illness and festering war wounds.
- Hospitals throughout country have very limited medical supplies
 - and are without screens on windows to keep insects
 - Little to no oxygen available and no inhalation anesthesia possible
 - Insufficient doctors, nurses, and medical staff to support the needs
 - Few beds, no food available to inpatients
- Long-term disorders resulting from famine and war: pathological grief, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and aberrant behavior in children.

Major Concerns

- For the health and welfare of Somalia people, we must get them food!
- There is little prospect of food production in Somalia increasing this year in comparison with last year, even if the weather is kind. Lack of seeds and agricultural equipment combined with insecurity means that smaller areas will be planted, and less food will find its way to market.
 - Most of the shortfall must be made good by international aid.

Other Major Concerns

- **Distributing food in Somalia is logistically straightforward but requires extremely careful planning to ensure security.**
 - Food relief does not move freely to all areas.
 - We need strategies for moving food through the country from ships at the ports.
- **A more general problem is the danger of attacks by looters and undisciplined soldiers.**
 - Delivering food can be hazardous. An aid worker was shot and died during a dispute during a food distribution.
 - Since that time, all distributions have been done by clan elders, not directly by the aid agencies themselves.
 - While this means that the targeting of food to the most needy, especially women and children, may be less than optimal, it is by far the best arrangement under the circumstances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- We all agree that food is the issue and that food must be brought in from external sources.
- The security problems associated with food delivery by the U.N. are likely to be greatest in the first few weeks of a major delivery program. The dangers will lessen as food becomes cheaper and more readily available. There are a number of elements critical to the success of such an operation. These include:
 - Sending food without waiting for the ceasefire negotiated by the U.N. to hold, without any other additional guarantees, before Mogadishu port is reopened or there is free access to all areas of the city.
 - Sending food simultaneously to ports or airports to the north and south of Mogadishu, so that the food relief program does not become a strategic asset to one side only, thereby inviting attack from the other side.
 - Making sure that the first shipments are heavily guarded, by deploying professional troops from the armies to serve escort duty.
 - Creating the confidence that the first deliveries will not be the last. This confidence is just as important as the food itself; if there is the expectation that food will become readily available, merchants will unload their stocks of food, thereby decreasing market prices, and the motives for stealing food will be reduced.
- Once we have started the food deliveries, we will then need to turn to increasing medical and economic resources.

Am I My Brother's Keeper?

- YES! Famine is a world-wide issue and the United States needs to be involved in prevention and relief of famine because:
 - We are a world power and with such power comes responsibility
 - Famine results in additional disease that can be transmitted to others
 - Famine results in additional conflict between and within nations that leads to additional deaths and famine

Sources

- NO MERCY IN MOGADISHU: The Human Cost of the Conflict & The Struggle for Relief *Africa Watch, Physicians for Human Rights* March 26, 1992. <http://hrw.org/reports/1992/somalia/>
- [International Famine Center](#)
- [El Nino Update](#)
- [Irish Potato Famine](#)
- [World Food Program](#)
- All imagers were taken from Microsoft Encarta (acknowledgement on image) and Microsoft Clip Art unless otherwise stated.