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SOMALIA FOOD AND LIVELIHOODS ALERT

Poor rains and falling incomes increasing risk of preventable disease and aid dependency in much of country

An Oxfam survey of households living in poverty across South Central Somalia and Puntland has found that recent poor rains, falling incomes and high food prices are increasing the risk of preventable disease and forcing people to rely on aid. The situation in the south of the country remains critical with alarming malnutrition figures.

Almost three quarters of people questioned are concerned they will not have enough to eat over the next four months because of the loss of livestock and livelihoods during last year's drought, and continued insecurity and poor rains this year. Since the assessment took place flooding in Hiran and predictions of flooding elsewhere in South Central Somalia is likely to make the situation worse.

Somalia's "Gu" 2012 rains – the country's major rainfall that occurs between April and June each year – were significantly lower than average. Between July and August 2012, Oxfam conducted a limited, top-line assessment in 40 districts across South Central Somalia and Puntland of the impact that poor Gu rains are having on Somalis who are still recovering from last year's crisis. Researchers focused on the poorest people using a combination of:

- 1,802 household interviews;
- 240 community based focus group discussions on issues that arose during the household interviews;
- Direct observations.

The Deyr rainy season from October 2011 to January 2012 brought high rainfall, resulting in increased agricultural production. However, following the subsequent poor Gu 2012 rains, **Oxfam has found that many regions are facing severe water and food shortages with children and pregnant women most vulnerable.**

In the coastal zone of Mudug, it is highly likely that an increasing number of people will fall into crisis, and there is particular concern about the southern region, especially South East Gedo, Lower Juba and Bakool, which remain in crisis made worse by a lack of water and high levels of malnutrition.

In contrast, there has been a relative improvement in security in Mogadishu, coupled with increased economic investment and sustained delivery of aid. This seems to have improved people's access to water, food and health care.

Malnutrition rates have slightly improved compared to this time last year, when more than 260,000 children were acutely malnourished. However Oxfam's assessment found that the situation remains critical across the southern regions of the country. This is supported by estimates from the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) that 236,000 children remain acutely malnourished.

Key Findings

Access to water

- Across all regions surveyed, access to water remains a concern because poor Gu rainfall has meant less water in shallow wells and ponds. People were concerned about the danger of water sources being contaminated and the distance they had to travel to fetch water. More than half of the people questioned say they are travelling at least one kilometre each way to collect water, and a quarter travel more than two kilometres.
- People in Gedo, Mudug and Bakool expressed the greatest concern about getting water in the coming months. Women from pastoralist communities in Gedo said they can face a round trip of up to 18 kilometres to collect water – a journey which was of even greater concern due to the risk of insecurity.
- Three quarters of those questioned say they do not treat their water. Those who take water from unprotected shallow wells, ponds and rivers are highly likely to contract waterborne diseases, especially as water quantity and quality is expected to decrease over the coming months with water points becoming overcrowded.
- In areas currently supplied by water trucking, the price of water is rising and people are worried that prices could “quadruple” over the next few months.
- In other areas where people are dependent on livestock to make a living, the cost of water has doubled in the past months and there is increasing concern that water is running out. It is estimated that many ponds are only three quarters their normal levels.
- With El Niño conditions predicted over the coming months, flooding is already occurring in South Central Somalia. Surface water sources could get damaged or silted as a result.

Access to food

- 72 percent of those questioned are concerned they will not have enough to eat during the next four months. In order to cope, 42 percent said they are already skipping meals, and 18 percent say they are eating less per meal.
- People say that the average family is spending \$28 a week on food and fuel. For a typical family of eight, this is equivalent to just 50 cents per person per day. At current market prices this would not pay for the minimum food intake – so even when families are buying food, they are still likely to be chronically food insecure.
- Food prices are more favourable compared to last year. Cereal prices are 50 percent below the three year average. This is good for families who rely on markets for their food.
- There has been a low harvest in many parts of the south, including in the major sorghum producing region of Bay, which normally accounts for almost two thirds of the country’s crop. In Middle Juba, Lower Shabelle and Gedo, there has been a significantly low maize harvest.
- Though food prices are more favourable than this time last year, they could rise due to insecurity as well as high import costs due to the global rise in food prices.
- Oxfam’s analysis of the survey results and trends shows that many people are still very reliant on food, water and other aid provided by local and international agencies. Any reduction in aid would hit the poorest people hardest.

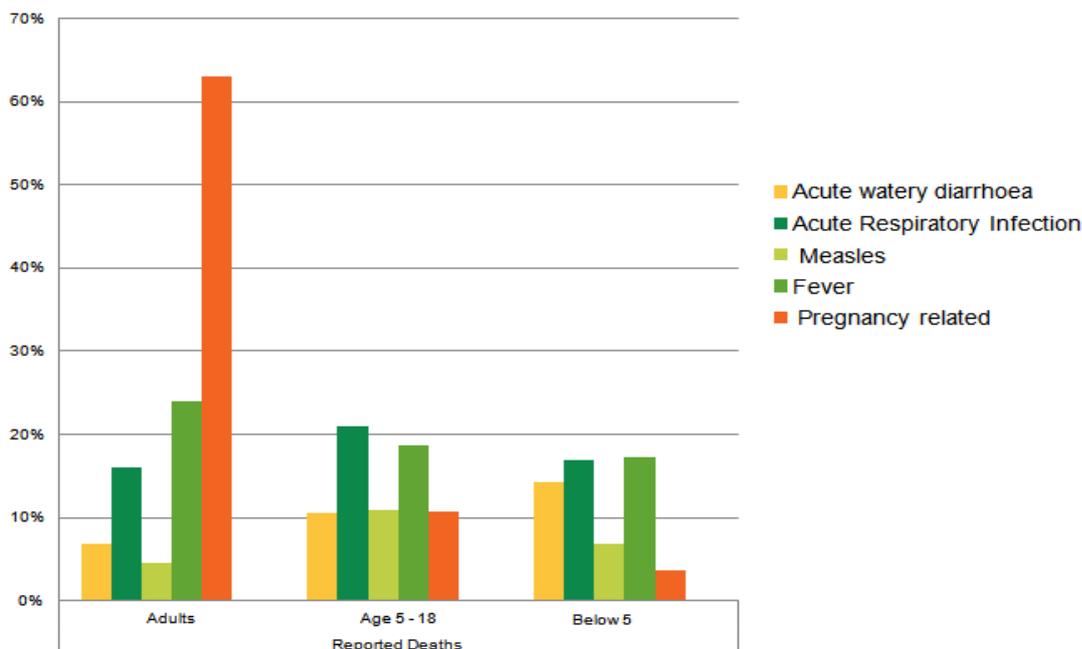
Incomes

- Overall, Oxfam found that incomes were two thirds lower than during a normal Gu season, because of decreases in livestock (see section on livestock below), crops, and milk production.
- People in Middle and Lower Shabelle, Mudug, Bakool and Gedo expressed the most concern about levels of family income. Drought and low agricultural productivity were said to be the main causes of low incomes.
- Opportunities for farm labouring jobs have been poor due to reduced farming activities, putting the most strain on women who make up approximately 70-80 percent of agricultural labourers.
- Poor families are increasingly looking to make money from collecting bush products such as grass, crop stalks, firewood and construction materials. Charcoal remains a major source of additional income with the price of a 50kg bag remaining 30 percent above the three year average.

Health

- Pregnant women, the elderly and children under five years old are now at high risk because of worsening hygiene conditions from water and food shortages.
- Just 44 percent of mothers with children under the age of one are breast feeding for more than six months. Given the high risk of water contamination this low rate of breast feeding could lead to an increase in infant illness, malnutrition and premature death.
- Access to basic health care is a major concern because facilities are widely seen as inadequate. As many as 28 percent of those surveyed said they did not live near a health facility and 80 percent said they needed more facilities. The regions that reported the greatest concern around health care were Bakool, Gedo, Mudug and Middle Shabelle.
- Oxfam's analysis of the assessment results revealed a disproportionately high number of women were dying because of pregnancy complications. Pregnant women are at high risk of dying from preventable illnesses, but are not finding the necessary treatment.

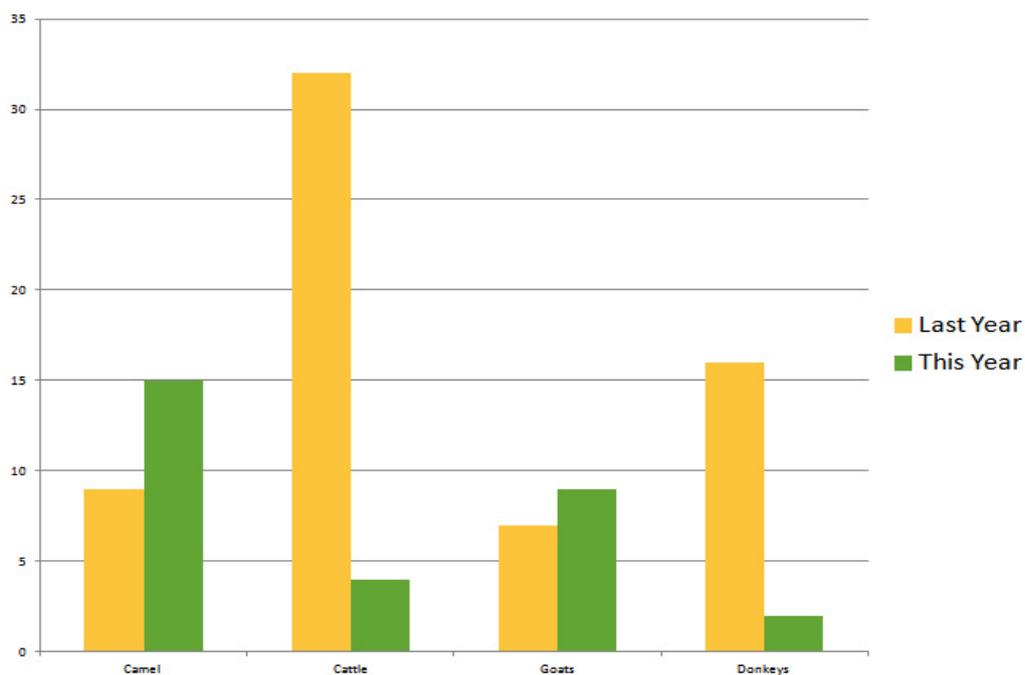
Figure 1: Respondents reported causes of death in their household



Livestock

- The livestock sector is critical to economic and cultural life in Somalia, providing food and income to more than 60 percent of the country's population. This year goat prices are around 20 percent above the three-year average and remain steady. At these prices, the sale of one goat would give a household of eight people enough maize to meet their food requirements for 45 days.
- However last year's crisis resulted in massive loss of livestock and herd sizes have not recovered. Goats have managed to retain their value since then, but the poorest families say they chose not to sell any animals as their herds are too small and they would prefer to keep their few remaining animals.
- There has been a significant change in livestock ownership patterns as a result of last year's drought. Cattle ownership has decreased while camel and goat ownership has increased because they are more resilient to drought, interviewees said.
- Milk production is below normal for south-east Somalia because fewer animals were able to conceive during the Deyr rainy season, leading to low calving rates and less livestock compared to last year. Herd sizes are now unable to sustain a household. While families in Lower Juba are less dependent on income from their livestock and held smaller herds, they are nevertheless concerned that it will take a long time to recover the herd sizes they had before last year's crisis.

Figure 2: Percentage change in livestock ownership from 2011 – 2012



Regional findings

Central Regions (Mudug, Galgadud, Hiran and Middle Shebelle): These regions have had mixed results from the 2012 Gu season. The most notable has been the successful crop production from Middle Shebelle, which will off-set price hikes to some extent. All the central regions are facing water shortages and malnutrition levels are still high and likely to remain a concern for the next four months.

Southern Regions (Gedo, Lower Juba, Middle Juba, Lower Shebelle, Bay and Bakool): Current levels of assistance appear to have been adequate to mitigate losses of life; however evidence suggests that it has not contributed significantly to the long-term capacity of communities. The major areas of concern are Gedo, Lower Juba and Bakool.

Mogadishu (Banadir): The situation in Mogadishu has improved significantly compared to last year. Food, water and health indicators all suggest the situation is still stressed but not critical. This may be due to the high levels of aid assistance as a result of the improved security situation.

Puntland (Bari and Nugal): Access to food, water availability and livelihoods have improved significantly since last year. Puntland has demonstrated a more significant recovery compared to the rest of the country because of improved security, lower asset losses during the famine last year, and a favourable Deyr 2011-12 season combined with an average level of Gu rainfall.

Conclusion

Long-term support and engagement to tackle the systemic problems which turn recurrent droughts in Somalia into humanitarian emergencies is essential. While the security situation across most of the country remains fluid and resolving the chronic conflict is key, investment in resilience programmes, for example: better water management, road rehabilitation and increased agricultural planning, is vital to help people cope better with food and water crises.

Southern Somalia is still in crisis and there is a possibility of deterioration. The emergency is most acute in the South East Gedo region, the riverine zone of Lower Juba, and Bakool. This will be made worse in areas where access is difficult due to continued conflict, and because of flooding over the next few months.

The Puntland regions have seen the most significant recovery because of better rains and less depleted livestock herds, as well as better opportunities to earn a living from alternative high value sources such as frankincense production.

Overall, recovery from last year's crisis is slow due to the enormous loss of livestock and on-going insecurity. Current levels of aid need to be maintained, scaled up in areas affected by flooding, and targeted more effectively if more people are to stand a chance of dealing with the crisis. The international community, and all international and national agencies operating in Somalia must build on the improvements made over the last year with increased focus on resilience to ensure long-term sustained recovery.

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