

WAR AND FAMINE IN SOMALIA

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story examines the famine in Somalia and how a civil war is making it harder to help those in need.

Famine is once again haunting the Horn of Africa, which includes the countries of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia. Unfortunately, this area is no stranger to cataclysmic droughts and famines. The most devastating occurred in Ethiopia in 1984. At that time, world opinion was moved by scenes of people dying of hunger. Massive amounts of humanitarian donations poured in. This generosity was largely triggered by the Live Aid concerts organized around the world that featured the most famous pop and rock bands of the time. Songs such as “We are the World,” “Feed the World,” and “Tears Are Not Enough” resulted from these concerts.

Since then, there have been other famines in the region, but the current one is exceptionally harsh. The war-torn country of Somalia is being hit particularly hard. In late July 2011, the United Nations declared many parts of Somalia to be famine zones. As a result, a massive airlift of food aid to the hardest-hit areas—where over two million people were facing the threat of starvation—began. Many of those affected were famine refugees on the move in search of food, both within Somalia itself and across the borders of nearby countries.

The job of aiding famine victims in Somalia is not easy. The country has been without a functioning government

for two decades and is plagued by an ongoing civil conflict. An extremist Islamic group controls the southern part of Somalia where the famine is most serious and has been unwilling to permit aid to enter the area. In addition, the Somali government, whose control barely extends beyond the capital city, Mogadishu, has proved to be too corrupt, inept, or unreliable to organize an effective food-distribution campaign. And finally, long-term causes such as climate change, rising food prices, and the lack of access to agricultural technology have all contributed to this catastrophe, which is affecting other countries in the region besides Somalia.

For the moment, however, the focus of global attention is on Somalia. Canada and other Western countries have pledged major amounts of humanitarian aid, and individuals and groups have also rallied to raise public awareness of the unfolding tragedy. Well-known Somalis now living abroad, such as the famous fashion model Iman and the Somali-Canadian pop singer K’naan have lent their voices to the cause and are calling on people in Canada and elsewhere to respond to this emergency with the same commitment and generosity that the world demonstrated during the 1984 famine in the Horn of Africa. Whether this will happen, however, remains to be seen.

To Consider

1. Do you think it is important to study humanitarian disasters like the famine in the Horn of Africa? Explain your position.
2. When a country is unstable because of civil war, it is more dangerous for aid workers to help citizens in need. Do you feel that this makes it more important that the world community try to help, or is it unfair to ask aid workers to provide assistance when they face danger by doing so? Provide reasons for your answer.

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Video Review

Quote

"Now is the time to act; there are already huge losses and a huge level of risk. There are 12 million people who are in jeopardy in this situation." — Robert Fox, executive director, Oxfam Canada (CTV News, July 28, 2011)

Did you know . . .

Weather forecasters predict that the drought in the Horn of Africa will persist until the end of 2011, making it the worst in 60 years.

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group discuss and respond to the following questions.

1. How much do you know about the famine that is currently affecting Somalia and other countries in the region called the Horn of Africa?

2. Why do you think this part of the world is so frequently affected by droughts and famines?

3. Give examples of some natural disasters that have taken place recently in different parts of the world. How have Canadians responded to these events? Do you think they will be as generous to victims of the famine in Somalia as they were in helping other people in need? Explain your answer.

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Why is it so difficult for international relief agencies to ship emergency food aid into Somalia?

2. What step did the United Nations take in late July 2011 to focus world attention on the situation in Somalia?

3. What is the name of the refugee camp where hundreds of thousands of Somalis are now seeking help? In what country is it located? How many people are living there?

4. What are the three main causes of the current famine now afflicting Somalia?

5. How much money has the Canadian government spent on aid to East Africa in 2011? What percentage of that amount went to help victims of the drought and famine in Somalia?

6. Why do many aid workers believe that the solution to the problem is to feed Somalis in their own country? What group inside Somalia has made this difficult?

7. How many people are affected by the drought in the Horn of Africa? How many need food aid?

8. Why does former CBC reporter Brian Stewart think that Canadians are more reluctant to contribute money to help famine victims in Somalia than they were with other natural disasters?

9. What is "Plumpy'doz" and why is it so effective in treating malnutrition in very young children?

10. How have Somali-Canadians and other Canadians responded to the famine in the Horn of Africa?

11. Why was the holy month of Ramadan such an appropriate time for Muslims to be contributing to famine relief fundraising drives in Canada?

Post-viewing Questions

1. Now that you have watched the video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. How has watching the video helped you to respond to the questions in greater depth?

2. Do you think that non-Somali or non-Islamic Canadians have responded as generously as a group to the famine in the Horn of Africa as people of those backgrounds? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree with Brian Stewart's views about why the response of Canadians to the famine in the Horn of Africa has been so slow?

4. Do you think that the world has responded in time to help the famine victims in Somalia and the Horn of Africa? Why or why not?

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The Current Crisis in Somalia

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, make notes on the most significant factors in the current famine crisis that is confronting Somalia and other countries of the Horn of Africa. Use the following chart as a template to organize your responses.

<p>Definition of a Famine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Nations has defined a famine according to three criteria of human suffering. • Twenty per cent of households face food shortages, 30 per cent suffer acute malnutrition, and two adults and four children per 10 000 people are dying per day.
<p>Why Somalia?</p>
<p>Crisis in the Horn of Africa</p>
<p>The Scope of the Emergency</p>

Definition of a Famine

Although all of the countries of the Horn of Africa are affected by the famine, the situation in Somalia is the most serious. When the United Nations declared a famine in the southern part of the country on July 20, 2011, the gravity of this catastrophe became apparent. This is because the UN does not use the term *famine* lightly. In order for a famine to exist, a number of criteria have to be met. These include:

- At least 20 per cent of households are facing extreme shortages of food with limited or no ability to cope.
- More than 30 per cent of the population must be suffering from acute malnutrition.
- Two adults and four children must be dying of hunger each day for every group of 10 000 people.

Why Somalia?

The famine in Somalia is most acute in the two southern regions of the country. But on August 3, the UN broadened the Somali famine zone to include the capital

city, Mogadishu—where many thousands of famine refugees had fled in search of food aid—and two other areas. Tens of thousands of people are believed to have already died, and an estimated 2.2 million others are considered at risk. After the famine was declared, the UN and other relief agencies began an emergency food airlift to the most severely affected areas.

On August 6, the radical Islamist group Al Shebab, which controls the southern part of Somalia and part of Mogadishu, announced that it was withdrawing its forces. This move was greeted with relief by international agencies whose efforts to aid famine victims had met with resistance from this group. On the same day, the United States pledged \$100-million in new famine aid to Somalia. After a tour of a Somali famine refugee camp in neighbouring Kenya in late July, Bev Oda, Canada's minister of international co-operation, committed Canada to spend \$50-million (an increase from the \$22-million originally pledged by Canada). In addition, for every dollar individuals or groups in Canada were able to donate to

Did you know . . .

The drought that has hit the Horn of Africa has already led to the deaths of 90 per cent of the cattle and other livestock of the nomadic people of the area.

help famine victims in Somalia between July 6 and September 16, the federal government would match the contribution.

Crisis in the Horn of Africa

Other countries in the region are also facing serious threats of famine, having suffered devastating droughts that have wiped out crops and caused the deaths of cattle that provide sustenance for the area's nomadic peoples. Some areas have not seen a drop of rain for years. While the population has grown considerably, food production has not been able to keep pace because local farmers lack access to machinery, irrigation, and fertilizers. To make matters worse, local conflicts and rapidly rising food prices on world markets have also had a negative impact. According to the World Food Program, an estimated 11.5 million people in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Uganda are in need of food and medical assistance, and a total of 13 million have been affected by drought.

However, it is in the southern part of Somalia where the need for emergency assistance is most acute and where international relief agencies are hoping world opinion will change and result in generous financial contributions. The UN estimates it needs \$300-million over the two months following the famine declaration to prevent spread to other parts of Somalia and an additional \$1.6-million for long-term relief programs.

Follow-up

1. With a partner or in small groups compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other to complete any missing information.
2. From what you have learned from this section about the famine in Somalia and other countries of the Horn of Africa, do you think this region and the world should have been better prepared in advance for this emergency? Why or why not?
3. In addition to receiving emergency food aid, Somalia will require major long-term assistance to prevent similar catastrophes in the future. With a partner or in a small group design a five-point plan for preventing or lessening the impact of future famines in this region.

The Scope of the Emergency

During the first six months of 2011, an estimated 130 000 Somalis fled to Kenya and Ethiopia—with over 50 000 in June alone. These famine refugees presented a serious challenge for their host nations, which were already coping with a serious drought within their own borders. As the famine continues, there have been fears that refugee camps in Kenya would be overloaded, creating yet another humanitarian emergency in that country.

The people of Somalia and the Horn of Africa are facing a serious situation, and any help may be long in coming. Nothing short of a massive infusion of aid, funded by foreign governments, international organizations, and individuals and groups will help to prevent the deaths of thousands more people who are facing starvation. In addition, Somalia will need to establish long-term peace and stability to create conditions for economic development and a secure and reliable food supply. The weather will also have to co-operate, with at least some rainfall occurring before the end of 2011. And finally, there will have to be an effort to address the crisis in spiraling global food prices that is causing devastating consequences for poor farmers in the Horn of Africa and other areas of the world.

Source: "Special report: Famine in Africa," CBC InDepth (www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/07/20/f-africa-famine-topix.html)

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The Issues behind the Famine

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, complete the following Cause and Consequence Chart, noting the most important causes and consequences of each of the four issues behind the famine in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.



Your teacher may choose to have you complete the Cause and Consequence web diagram available on the News in Review Web site at <http://newsinreview.cbclearning.ca/worksheets/>.

Issue	Cause	Consequence
The Global Economy of Food	A combination of natural and human factors have led to a severe shortage of food in the Horn of Africa.	Millions of farmers are unable to grow crops or feed livestock and are facing starvation.
Desertification and Climate Change		
Internal Conflicts		
Agricultural Self-Sufficiency		

The famine in Somalia is like other natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or tornadoes in that it is caused by forces beyond human control. But this catastrophe is also the consequence of human actions. A number of causes lie behind this famine, and each has resulted in profound and tragic consequences. Below you will read about some of the most significant.

The Global Economy of Food

The Horn of Africa is the poorest part of the world's poorest continent. Of the over 160 million people who live there,

more than 40 per cent regularly confront severe shortages of food, even when droughts and famines are not a problem. The population has doubled over the past few decades, but food production has not been able to keep pace. Many farmers in the area do not have access to machinery and fertilizers, leading to a very low rate of productivity, even in good years when rainfall is abundant. This means that they must consume all of the food they grow to feed themselves and their livestock, leaving nothing in reserve as a protection against future droughts or famines.

The food crisis in the region has

Definition

Desertification is the transformation of once-arable (farmable) land into desert—in other words, the loss of farmable land.

Did you know . . .

In Somalia, deforestation is being accelerated by the cutting down of trees to produce charcoal that is exported to Saudi Arabia and India.

become chronic. This is because local farmers cannot compete with cheaper food imported from developed countries. This surplus food is dumped on local markets for far less than local producers might expect to earn for their crops. As a result, they see no incentive in producing more, and when famine strikes they do not have the resources to purchase even the cheaper imported food that may be available.

When the harvest failed at the end of 2010, the nomadic farmers who constitute about 70 per cent of Somalia's people started to lose their cattle and other livestock, which are the basis of their way of life. Thus, they had nothing left to sell in order to purchase food to prevent them from starving to death. After eating whatever food they had in reserve, they were literally left with nothing. To make matters worse, rising food prices in the region made it impossible for them to buy food in Mogadishu, where many had migrated.

Desertification and Climate Change

Rain is the source of life for the people of southern Somalia and the Horn of Africa. This is a region that is no stranger to severe droughts and famines. But the effects of climate change are impacting the region's ecological balance, with devastating consequences for its people. There is very little irrigation, and farmers must make the best of the rains when they come. The main factor responsible for desertification is deforestation, the loss of trees that provide anchors for the soil and prevent it from drifting away when the rains stop falling. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Ethiopia lost almost 19 per cent of its total forest cover between 1990 and 2010.

The loss of arable land is making an already difficult situation even worse

for the nomadic farmers of Somalia who depend on pastures and water for their herds of cattle. With the remaining land being sold off to foreign agri-businesses based in China, Saudi Arabia, and India, local farmers are often evicted and must find alternative work as day labourers for the foreign agri-business combines or migrate to the cities in search of employment.

Internal Conflicts

Somalia remains at the epicentre of an ongoing conflict that shows few signs of ending soon. Since 1991, Somalia has been a "failed state" with no functioning government able to take control. In the wake of this chaos, a radical Islamist group called Al Shebab has controlled the southern part of Somalia, the region most affected by the famine. It is making it difficult for UN agencies to enter the region. Al Shebab believes that the UN is using the excuse of the famine, the existence of which it denies, as a cover for undermining its authority.

In return for allowing Western food agencies to enter southern Somalia, Al Shebab has imposed conditions, such as a total ban on female aid workers and the levying of taxes and security fees. In addition, it is alleged that the group has looted food-aid convoys meant for starving Somalis in order to feed its own members. This policy has led to an erosion of popular support for the group.

The Goal of Agricultural Self-Sufficiency

The famine in southern Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa is just a symptom of a much deeper problem facing the entire continent. After the end of European colonialism in the 1960s and 70s, Africa gained independence. But since that time, the continent has been unable to feed itself. While some countries, such as South Africa, can

afford to import sufficient quantities of food, poorer nations face serious shortfalls and resulting malnutrition, even when droughts and famines are not present.

The irony in this situation is that the countries of the region possess large amounts of potentially fertile land that, if effectively developed, could grow more than enough food to provide for the local population and even produce a surplus that could be exported abroad. What is lacking is the right agricultural strategy on the part of the region's governments. In Kenya and Ethiopia food shortages have occurred, but local authorities have been able to cope with

them by stockpiling emergency supplies in advance. But this is not the case in Somalia because of civil conflict and the lack of governmental authority. As a result, Somalia has become dependent on foreign food aid, and many people are fleeing the country in search of help elsewhere. The Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya is now home to an estimated half million Somalis and is growing by thousands every day, making it the largest in the world.

Source: "Horn of Africa famine is as much about geopolitics as drought," CBC News Online, July 25, 2011 (www.cbc.ca/news/story/2011/07/25/f-famine-somalia-analysis.html)

Follow-up

1. With a partner or in small groups, complete the information in the Cause and Consequence Chart. Help each other to complete any missing information.
2. With a partner or in small groups, read one part of this section discussing a specific issue behind the famine in the Horn of Africa. Brainstorm some possible solutions that local and foreign governments, international humanitarian relief organizations, and other agencies could adopt in order to deal effectively with this issue. Then present your plan to the entire class and evaluate its merits, focusing on the likelihood of its being enacted.

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Somalia: A Brief History

Focus for Reading

In your notebook create an organizer like the one below. As you read the following information on different periods in the history of Somalia, record key points in your organizer. You should be able to enter at least four or five points in each section of your chart. You will be using this information in the activities that follow the text material.

An Ancient, Fabled Land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
A Plaything of the Cold War <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
Descent into Chaos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •

An Ancient, Fabled Land

Somalia is located on the eastern coast of Africa in an area known as the Horn of Africa. It borders Djibouti to the north, Ethiopia to the west, and Kenya to the south. Its coastline faces the Arabian Sea. Somalia's population is estimated at 9.3 million and its capital city is Mogadishu. The main religion is Islam. Somalia is one of the poorest countries in Africa, and most of its people make their living from raising crops or livestock. It frequently suffers from lack of rainfall, leading to drought and sometimes widespread famine.

To the ancient Egyptians, Somalia was known for its spices, ebony, and other exotic goods. A flourishing trade developed between Somalia and other ancient civilizations, including Egypt, Greece, Rome, and eventually India. Indian spices such as cinnamon were imported to Somalia and later shipped to other parts of the Mediterranean, where they were in great demand and fetched high prices in local markets.

Islam spread to Somalia in the seventh century CE and quickly took root. The Adel sultanate became the most powerful local monarchy and established important trading centres in the cities of Mogadishu and Zeila. By the late Middle Ages, however, it had fractured into a number of warring successor states that sometimes allied themselves with the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia in order to subdue their rivals. Throughout this period, trade between Somalia and parts of Asia continued to thrive.

Portuguese explorers were the first Europeans to take an interest in Somalia. Vasco da Gama sailed into Mogadishu on his voyage to India and noted its splendid



Did you know . . .

Somalia became an independent country on July 1, 1960, when the former Italian and British colonies were merged into the Republic of Somalia.

port and houses. In 1875, Egypt claimed control over the Somali coast and parts of the interior. At the Congress of Berlin in 1884, the major European powers divided Africa among themselves, thus beginning the “Scramble for Africa.”

In 1887, Britain took over the northern region of Somaliland, while France had already staked a claim to the part of the Somali coast that later was to become Djibouti. Not to be outdone, Italy also established its own zone of influence, in central and southern Somalia.

Local Somali rulers strongly opposed this European takeover and, under Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, fought against foreign occupation. This conflict lasted from the 1880s to the 1920s and was known as the Dervish wars.

Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, but during the Second World War British troops drove Italian forces out of Somalia and later Ethiopia itself. After the war, the former Italian possessions in Somalia were placed under the authority of the United Nations, while Britain resumed control over its areas. By the 1950s, a strong demand for independence and the unification of all Somali-speaking regions was on the rise.

A Plaything of the Cold War

Aden Abdullah Osman Daar became Somalia’s first president and held the post until 1967 when he lost an election to his rival Abdi Rashid Ali Sharmarke. In 1969, following Sharmarke’s assassination, Mohammed Siad Barre, an army general, seized power in a coup d’état. Under Barre’s dictatorship, Somalia became a socialist state closely allied with the Soviet Union. Following a severe drought and famine in the mid-1970s, Barre sent Somali troops across the border into Ethiopia in 1977 to retake a region known as the Ogaden.

At first, Somali forces made gains, but by this time a radical, pro-communist

group of army officers known as the Derg had toppled Emperor Haile Selassie and seized power in Ethiopia. The Derg appealed to the Soviet Union and Cuba for military aid to drive out the Somali invaders, and by 1978 Somali troops had to retreat from the Ogaden. As a result of this defeat, Barre broke off ties with his former communist allies and entered into a new relationship with the United States. Somalia thus became a plaything in the Cold War, which was then raging between the Soviet Union and the United States. As a result of massive U.S. military aid, Somalia’s army became one of the largest in the world, while most of its people remained desperately poor.

Although no longer ruling a socialist state, Barre remained a dictator and used his power to reward members of his own clan while depriving others of any benefits. His rule remained ruthless, and by the 1980s many Somalis were growing tired of it. In 1991 a loose coalition of groups whose only point of agreement was their hatred of Barre’s regime toppled the dictator. By this time, the Cold War had ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Somalia, however, was about to enter the darkest period of its history.

Descent into Chaos

The groups that allied against Barre quickly began to quarrel following his fall. Rival warlords used their private armies to take over various parts of Somalia, especially the capital city of Mogadishu. The country was spiraling into chaos with no effective government in place, and thousands of people were being killed. In 1992, the United Nations sent peacekeeping forces into Somalia under a plan code-named Operation Restore Hope. U.S. troops assumed a leading role in this operation until 1993, when Somali insurgents shot down two U.S. helicopters over Mogadishu.

In the ensuing battle, 19 U.S. marines and thousands of Somalis were killed. Images of the mutilated bodies of U.S. soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu horrified Americans at home and turned the country against any continuing military presence in Somalia. Meanwhile, Hollywood presented its own cinematic version of these events in the film *Black Hawk Down*.

In 1995, the last UN peacekeepers withdrew from Somalia, having totally failed to “restore hope” or even some semblance of order. Throughout the early 2000s, various Somali groups tried without success to establish a stable national government, while the regions of Puntland to the northwest and Somaliland to the northeast broke away, no longer wanting to be under the rule of whoever held power in Mogadishu. However, to date not a single foreign country has recognized the legitimacy of their claims to self-government.

By 2006, the influence of Islamist groups in Somalia had grown considerably, and an organization known as the Union of Islamic Courts assumed control in Mogadishu and the southern part of the country.

In 2009, a more radical Islamist group known as Al Shebab gained control of the southern part of Somalia and parts of Mogadishu. The internationally recognized government was unable to subdue Al Shebab, which now proclaimed its support of Al Qaeda, the terrorist group responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. To add to Somalia’s lengthy list of problems the worst drought in six decades was leading to complete devastation by early 2011. Somalia now confronted the most serious famine emergency in many years.

Source: “Somalia” (<http://en.wiki.org/wiki/Somalia>)

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other to complete any missing information.
2. What negative impacts did the periods of European colonialism and the Cold War have on Somalia’s history and development?
3. What have been some of the main reasons why Somalia has descended into a state of almost permanent chaos since the fall of the Barre dictatorship in 1991? What are the most significant negative consequences of this?

