

## Famine in Eastern Africa:

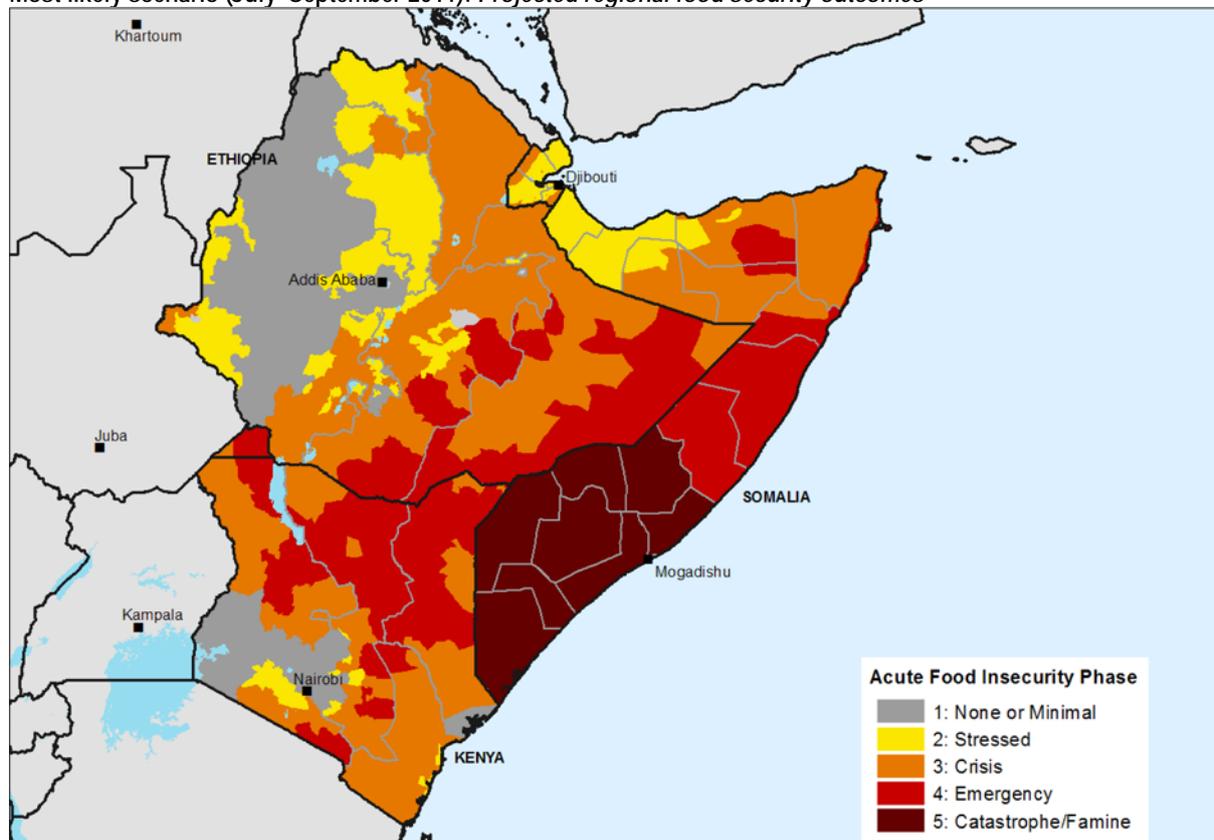
**The sustainable solution will not come from external actors –  
 More responsibility must be taken up by the region’s leaders!**

By Sibiri Jean Zoundi, SWAC/OECD Principal Administrator, 11 August 2011

### Recurrent and complex food crises

Once more, the Horn of Africa is subject to a food crisis disaster affecting nearly 11 million people. What is taking place in this part of Africa, of which Somalia constitutes the epicentre, is not a new phenomenon. Eastern Africa is characterised by environmental fragility, in which episodes of drought and floods follow one another – resulting in waves of displaced populations. More than 180 million people live in the area, including 135 million people from rural populations and at least 20 million shepherds that almost exclusively depend on livestock farming. These communities represent nearly 70% of the Somali population and are most vulnerable to food crises.

Most likely scenario (July–September 2011): *Projected regional food security outcomes*



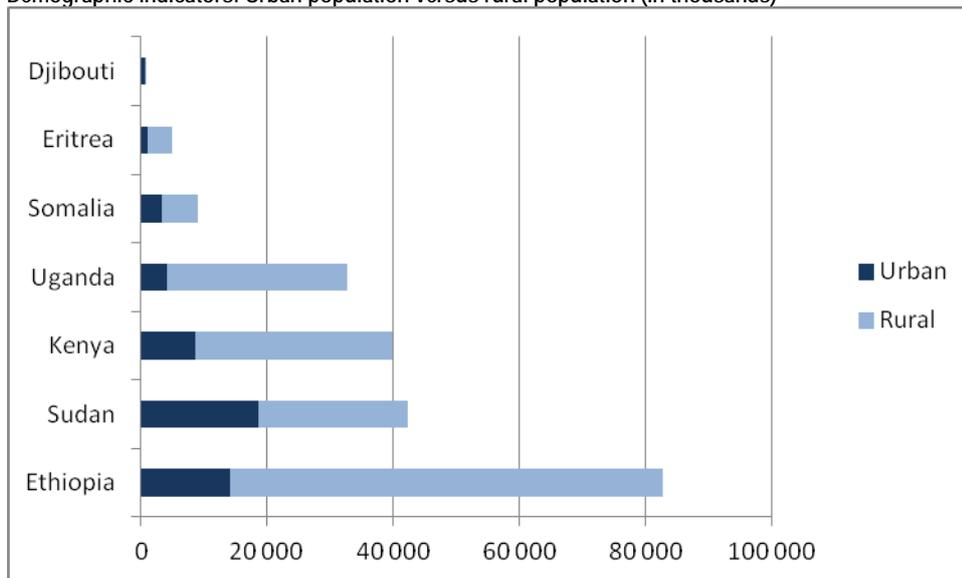
Note: FEWSNET maps are now aligned to IPC scale.

Source: Famine in Southern Somalia – Joint FSNAU/ FEWSNET Declaration in Nairobi – 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011

### *Should we attribute the recurrent food crises merely to natural adversities?*

Drought is always put forward as the main cause of repetitive famines but it does not explain this phenomenon solely. Food production is structurally insufficient, even in years of relatively good pluviometric records, due to the manifest lack of production means and weak incentive policies. Poor food aid management has also contributed to rendering local food production less attractive. Several analyses reveal that distributing surplus food aid at the wrong time perturbs local markets and does not inspire sustainable investment in local food production. In 2007-08, five countries of the region were some of the first ten beneficiaries of worldwide emergency food aid. Ethiopia and the Sudan ranked first and second, with respectively 915 000 tons and 673 000 tons of such emergency food aid received.

Demographic indicators: Urban population versus rural population (in thousands)



Source: African Economic Outlook 2010, Demographic indicators, table 13.

The region is also weakened by recurrent armed conflicts that have affected the area for several decades. Endemic conflicts and widespread poverty reduce the populations' ability to face environmental and climate related challenges. Drought, famine, conflict and governance issues are thus interlinked and this hybridisation of natural, political and security issues is at the heart of the cyclical nature of food crises in the region. Consequently, an integrated, regional and inclusive approach will be needed. An economic regional organisation, such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), could play a key role.

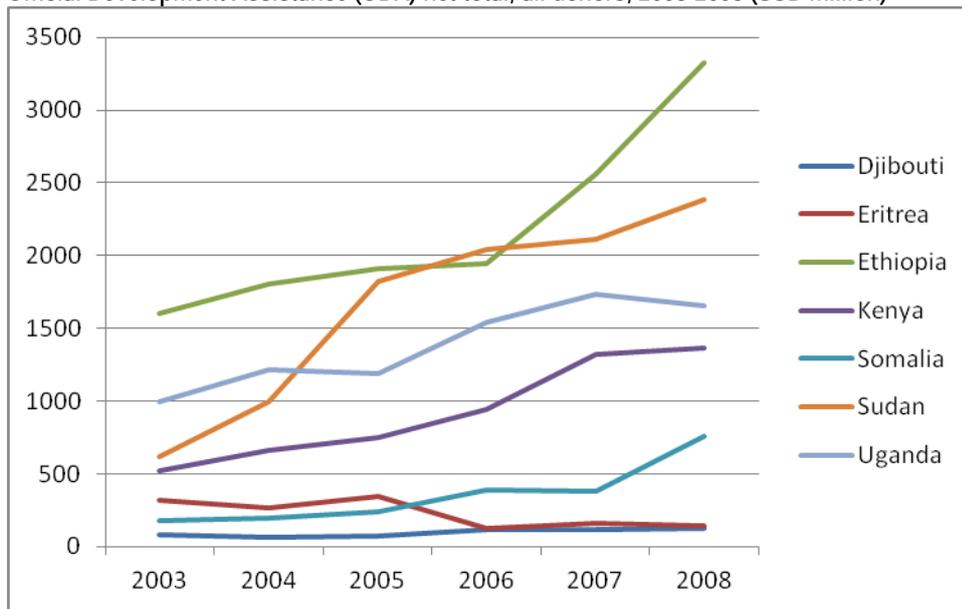
### More responsibilities must be taken up by the governments of the region

Breaking the cycle of food crises in Eastern Africa requires more responsibilities from African governments. The humanitarian emergency attenuates the most serious suffering but it does not heal the causes. Therefore, although necessary and vital at times, humanitarian aid should not be perceived as the sole or primary solution to food security crises. Consequentially, a sustainable solution will not come from external actors as more responsibility must be taken up by the region's leaders, from whom populations have the right to expect swift political action. They must:

- ⇒ Put an end to the vicious cycle of armed conflicts and political instability;
- ⇒ Put in place government-sponsored agricultural and food policies which attract sustainable investments in order to ensure their implementation; raise agricultural productivity and develop adaptation and mitigation measures in response to climate change impacts (irrigation methods and investments aiming at reducing the vulnerability of pastoral populations); incentivise local food production (tackling land laws, improving conditions for production);
- ⇒ Reinforce the regional market in removing the distortions between national markets, and improving the business climate (infrastructure);
- ⇒ Reinforce the early-warning and alert systems on drought, food security, and armed conflicts.

These are key concerns for the international community, whose aid, especially in Ethiopia and the Sudan, has greatly increased during the past years. This increase in aid to IGAD member countries clearly aims to place international action beyond humanitarian action in order to support the countries' efforts in addressing root causes of food insecurity.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) net total, all donors, 2003-2008 (USD million)



Source: African Economic Outlook 2010, Aid Flows, table 11.

*However, do the affected countries and development partners sufficiently take into account the regional dimension of food insecurity?*

### Drawing lessons from West Africa's experience

Eastern Africa can draw lessons from the experiences of other African regions, with those of West Africa in particular. Following the recurrent food crises in the Sahel, notably those from 1973 to 1984, and within the framework of the Food Crises Prevention Network ([RPCA](#)), the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel ([CILSS](#)) and the "Club du Sahel" have elaborated a process of analysis and co-operation that led to the approval of the Food Aid Charter in 1990. This Charter defines the basic principles to which Sahel countries are committed to that donors and national authorities share and agree upon in order to avoid the negative effects of aid, thus contributing to improving food aid effectiveness.

Today, the Charter is currently undergoing a revision process. This revision became necessary, in order to effectively respond to the changing environment that is marked by the increasingly complex nature of food crises, the arrival of new donors, the stronger impact of the global market, and the rising role of civil society organisations and local actors. From 2007-2011, the CILSS and the Secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club ([SWAC/OECD](#)) conducted, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)) Commission, a consultation process that included such new actors. It aimed at reflecting and responding to these new realities of food security.

Thus, a new Charter is born: "The Charter for the prevention and management of food crises" shifts from joint food aid management towards prevention and management of crises (mutual responsibility). It clearly affirms the responsibilities of regional organisations and of non-state actors, and enlarges its geographic coverage from the Sahel to West Africa. It particularly insists upon governmental and intergovernmental responsibilities, including:

- Seeking sustainable solutions to address the root causes of food insecurity:
  - ⇒ Develop an operational food security strategy and corresponding policies in each country and define implementation programmes based on participative consultations of all stakeholders;
  - ⇒ Implement development and investment policies to promote local food production (national and sub-regional; for example: training of agricultural professionals, the strengthening of national and regional markets, and the increase of incomes for vulnerable populations);
  - ⇒ Promote research and training in the field of nutrition and reinforce food safety;
  - ⇒ Finance through endogenous financial resources (governments, regional organisations) at least 50% of implemented food security programmes.
- Proscribe the implementation of policies compromising the achievement of food security objectives set by the countries and the region;
- Make progress towards the realisation of the “*right to food*” in accordance with national priorities, particularly through the elaboration of legal frameworks, action plans, and their financing.

Following a consultation process in the 17 countries that are covered by the Charter, the new text is currently in the process of finalisation and will be approved by an ECOWAS ministerial meeting in September 2011. This West African experience could be a source of inspiration for other regions inflicted with food insecurity.

### **Resolving common problems together provides an opportunity to improve relationships while deepening the regional policy dialogue.**

The West African experience also teaches us that a permanent regional dialogue on combating drought and food crises is a way of reinforcing solidarities between peoples and governments. The impact of CILSS on the inter-Sahelian policy dialogue is obvious, although it is not quantifiable. Regular meetings between ministries and Heads of State at the regional level in tandem with close collaboration between local and national administrations undeniably facilitated dialogue on other issues, particularly security-related ones. From this point of view, IGAD is certainly a precious tool that needs to be preserved and reinforced.

For more information:

- ⇒ In French : [Une Charte pour la prévention et la gestion des crises alimentaires en Afrique de l'Ouest](#)
- ⇒ In English: [Charter for Food Crisis Prevention and Management](#)

**Your comments are welcome!**

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