
Hunger, disaster, hope:
**rethinking humanitarian
action in Africa**

Advocacy report



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Foreword



How far has Africa come as a continent? What progress has it made? Have the lives of its people improved in recent years?

These are questions we regularly ponder. The money we spend, the programmes we implement, the people we assist... Are we making a difference?

The answer is 'yes'. Our work does make a difference to the lives of countless people, from Dakar to Dar es Salaam, from Cairo to Cape Town. And yet, at the same time, we acknowledge that we can do better.

Despite unprecedented wealth and progress in the world, the lives of Africa's extremely poor are characterized by pitiless hunger, preventable diseases, inadequate living conditions and the tragic loss of lives. And their plight is worsening at a rapid pace.

This report takes a critical look at how humanitarian support is implemented in Africa. Its focus is on hope, on moving ahead, and on the belief of the Red Cross Red Crescent that, despite the gloom and the dire distress, the success being achieved by its African National Societies points to a model for the road ahead. Alongside the delivery of relief, proactive involvement at local level – from risk reduction to social mobilization – is paying off.

Over-reliance on reactive disaster response will contribute less and less to lasting solutions as aid organizations require more and more funding to meet the basic needs of a growing number of disaster-affected people. Given climate change, global economic crisis, longer-term food insecurity and other persistent challenges, doing business as before will only hinder progress. As the Red Cross Red Crescent has repeatedly said, disaster is rarely natural – only hazards are; more precisely, disasters are failures to cope with hazards.

Across the continent, many of our National Societies are calling for renewed emphasis on the developmental approaches they already pursue at community level, the support that comes from their grass-roots networks, the simple empowerment they see as critical to improving the lives of vulnerable people and strengthening their resilience.

We see every day the willingness of African communities to decisively act to mitigate their prolonged suffering. Our volunteers – themselves members of the communities that they serve – see the innate willingness of families and villages to make a difference to their own lives. They are witness to the hope, but also they see the growing challenges: population growth, accelerating disaster trends and spreading food insecurity.

They see communities taking risks to avoid the growing pressures on their livelihoods. They bid farewell to their brothers and sisters who choose to leave their homes for the initial hope and ultimate disappointment of urban slums. It doesn't have to be like this. Communities want to seize control and they are already doing so – they simply need our support.

Technology and experience have given us tools to better provide this support: to preempt many of the chronic challenges that beset the continent today. It is up to us all – humanitarian agencies, African governments, institutions and donors – to make better use of them.

Belief in Africa is essential if we are to seriously confront what lies ahead. And the first to believe in Africa must be Africans; communities must believe in themselves.

People who are unable to feed their family lose that belief, and with it their dignity. They stop doing what they are capable of. We must contribute to restoring their belief and hope.



Introduction



“Dawn, and as the sun breaks through the piercing chill of night on the plain outside Korem it lights up a biblical famine, now, in the Twentieth Century. This place, say workers here, is the closest thing to hell on earth.”

Michael Buerk, BBC Correspondent, 24 October, 1984



This iconic image depicts Korem, northern Ethiopia, as it was 25 years ago. In the midst of famine, a multitude gathers around an aid agency feeding centre. This mega-famine in the mid-1980s pushed millions of Ethiopians and Eritreans to breaking point and claimed at least a million lives.

Today, an estimated 6.2 million Ethiopians face food insecurity as drought and hunger tighten their grip once more across the wider Horn of Africa¹.

In Jilango, north-eastern Kenya, a quarter of a century after Korem, the landscape is a barren reddish-brown, bereft of all but withered scrub. Years of recurrent drought have sucked it bone dry and what isn't dust is as hard as rock. A farmer's hoe cannot break it. The land breaks the hoe and the farmer.

Across the Horn an estimated 28 million people are without enough food. In Jilango, the livestock is dead or dying and a woman says: "Today it is the animals. Tomorrow we will follow."

Has anything changed? After decades of humanitarian efforts in Africa and countless billions of dollars, has life improved?

Any examination of current and predicted patterns of hunger, disaster and urbanization must highlight the often despairing need of African communities, but as this report does that, it also points to solutions.

It also argues for far greater investment in disaster risk reduction, and commitment to an approach that straddles the gap between humanitarian assistance and development. Success stories bolster the case, with examples of African communities who, with the support of humanitarian actors, have taken real and tangible steps towards limiting the impact of calamitous events.

¹. *BBC News Online, Ethiopia asks for urgent food aid, 22 October 2009. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8319741.stm>*



People living in slums can pay five to ten times as much for water as those living in affluent areas of their city. The result? Few people are able to access the 20 litres of water a day that should be seen as a minimum.

Top-line messages:

- ✎ *Vulnerable people must be the primary partners of humanitarian actors.* Solutions that are imposed are rarely sustainable. The people themselves know the risks that they face; the role of humanitarians is to support and guide them.
- ✎ *Intensified efforts to reduce disaster risk can dramatically lessen the impact of disasters and help avoid chronic hunger.* Such an approach also protects developmental gains that can so easily be undermined by disasters and chronic hunger.
- ✎ *Disaster risk reduction is cost effective.* Much less money is required to increase agricultural productivity or to support people to prepare for disasters than to run relief operations.
- ✎ *Emergency assistance will continue to play a crucial role, but it needs to improve.* We need to be more proactive. We need to use early warnings that can inform decisive early action. Science can help us to do this – can help us link disaster response and risk reduction. Climatologists and meteorologists are already showing how.
- ✎ *We urge the donor community to better support Red Cross Red Crescent efforts* that are designed to bridge disaster response, recovery and development.
- ✎ *Much more investment must be made to strengthen people's capacity and initiate sustainable solutions.* The International Federation calls on donors to dedicate a significant proportion of the funds they spend on disaster response to risk reduction and community-level development.
- ✎ *Investment must also be made in strengthening local Red Cross Red Crescent and other civil society capacity.* Stronger National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – organizations that are able to creatively and proactively address and reduce vulnerability – are key allies in national efforts to alleviate poverty and drive development.

BOX 1 AFRICA'S INDICATORS¹

Water and sanitation

- 322 million: people in sub-Saharan Africa who do not have access to clean water
- 436 million: people in sub-Saharan Africa who are without adequate sanitation services
- 321 million: people in sub-Saharan Africa who practise open defecation – a decision for many that is made in the absence of a hygienic alternative

Health and care

- 1 million: the number of children on the continent who die each year from malaria
- 40 per cent: the proportion of national public health expenditure that is directed towards malaria where the disease is endemic
- 1 in 7: the number of children who will die before the age of five

HIV and AIDS

- 6,195: deaths attributed to AIDS in Africa per day
- 47: average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa when it could be 62 without AIDS
- Two-thirds: the proportion of the world's HIV-infected population who live in sub-Saharan Africa, despite the fact that just over 10 per cent of the world's population lives in this region
- 15 million: the number of Africans who have died from AIDS since the start of the epidemic
- 50 per cent: the proportion of all hospital beds in sub-Saharan Africa that are occupied by people living with HIV-related diseases
- 60 per cent: the proportion of new HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa found in women and girls

Socio-economic

- 48 per cent: the proportion of sub-Saharan Africa's population that lives on less than US\$ 1 per day
- 2.18 per cent: the average population growth in Africa
- 54.3: the average life expectancy in Africa
- 18.6: the average age in Africa
- 1,041: GDP per capita, in US dollars, as compared to a worldwide average of US\$ 6,844
- 74 per cent: the proportion of all primary school-age children in sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in school, an increase of 15 per cent since 2000
- 79: girls enrolled in high school for every 100 boys enrolled
- 900: maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa, as compared to 9 deaths in developed regions

¹Sources various: ONE, The DATA report 2008, (www.one.org/report); United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009, New York, 2009; UNAIDS, 2008 report on the global AIDS epidemic, New York, 2009 (<http://www.unaids.org/>)

The facts at a glance



Food insecurity, disasters, overlapping climatic extremes and rapid urbanization – these are all major contributors to vulnerability in Africa on which this report is focused. There are more, of course, such as inadequate access to water and sanitation, and the heavy burden of communicable diseases. They all have a dramatic impact on the humanitarian state of the African continent. The global economic crisis is also having an effect on Africa's poor and vulnerable people. All these threats interact or are interrelated. (See Box 1: Africa's indicators)

Even with just a cursory glance at the statistics, it is easy to be pessimistic.

- 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are food insecure and in need of external assistance to meet minimum dietary requirements.
- 18 million Africans were affected by disasters in 2008 – out of the 316 million affected over the past decade, of whom 46,000 died.
- Between 1999 and 2008, disasters were responsible for approximately US\$ 13 billion worth of damage² – a figure that exceeds the GDP of an entire country like Uganda.
- Sub-Saharan Africa's food gap in 2008 – the difference between the food it has and the food it needs – was more than 14 million tons, and it gets just 4 million tons of food aid annually³.

Statistics only tell part of the story. Among those 400 million who are food insecure⁴, the impact goes far beyond empty stomachs. To survive, families are often forced to divert their limited resources away from education and health-care – a painful choice that undermines development on a macro level.

²International Federation. *World Disasters Report 2009: Focus on early warning, early action*. Geneva, 2009.

³United States Department of Agriculture. *Food Security Assessment, 2008–09*. Washington, June 2009.

⁴Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), June 2009.



BOX 2
**SENEGAL'S
UNNATURAL
DISASTER¹**

By the time he arrived, the water was waist high. Ahmadou Niasse climbed over the roofs of his neighbours' houses to reach his wife and children trapped on the upper floor of their home.

He had been ready for the floods. Every rainy season, water pours into Pikine in the unplanned sprawl of Dakar's poor suburbs, and Niasse – a Senegalese Red Cross volunteer coordinator – mobilizes a response. But 2009 was different. The first SOS call to reach him was from his own wife.

"Come home now or we'll die here," she told him.

Two months on, their home is still flooded and they have moved out. The water level has dropped but, like much of their neighbourhood, the lower floor remains beneath green, rubbish-strewn, stagnant water polluted by the excrement of washed-out latrines. From a neighbouring rooftop, Ahmadou Niasse looks down on his yard. "How can I bring my

When people fail to cope, when food becomes scarce or when villages are flattened by storms or floods, many head to Africa's cities. Today, 62 per cent of all those who live in sub-Saharan cities, some 200 million people⁵, live in impoverished districts in sub-standard conditions. Put simply: slums.

There, they face yet more vulnerability. Only a third of people living in slums have access to basic, hygienic sanitation. Access to water is not a great deal better. In some of the continent's largest slums, residents pay five to ten times more for water than those living in affluent areas. The shanty towns and spontaneous suburbs that ring African cities are often built on land that is also unfit for habitation. In Dakar, residents of the Pikine district suffer annual floods because the low-lying land is a former swamp once dried by droughts but once again exposed to heavy rainfall. (See Box 2: Senegal's *unnatural disaster*)

Flood, drought and economic crisis

Poor agricultural productivity – influenced by increasingly unpredictable and hostile weather – is often a primary reason for people to flee rural areas for the idealized opportunities of city life.

The weather is "upside down" a drought manager in eastern Africa said. Dry times are wet and wet times are dry. Hassan Yunis, 71, a farmer in north-eastern Kenya's Balambala division, agreed. The drought is the worst he can remember, but he's afraid of a flood.

Having just returned disappointed from the countryside, he said: "I had 500 goats but I couldn't find a single one good enough for market. They tell me

5. Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), June 2009.

children back to this?" he asks. "I must find a new place that doesn't flood."

He is concerned by statistics of diarrhoea and malaria. In a Red Cross survey of one badly flooded commune, 60 per cent of families reported cases of malaria. "It is to be expected with all this standing water. It's the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes."

The Niasses have found temporary accommodation, but finding a new home is proving more difficult. Many others are also searching and the floods have driven up rents. Opportunistic landlords are profiting from people's misfortune. There are signs of unrest in Pikine. The population is angry: angry at the landlords, angry at a government they accuse of inaction, angry at neighbours whose flood defences, they say, re-routed the water to others' homes.

But no one should have been living there in the first place. The floods have not so much come to the people as the people have come to the floods. The suburb grew up amidst a natural swamp.

Before the Sahel droughts of the 1970s this was naturally watered farming land known for its very productive market gardens. Drought brought an end to agriculture and, when rural migrants arrived, driven from the countryside by the same disaster, they found dry open

spaces on which to settle. By the time the rains returned, tens of thousands of people had followed. The once green outskirts were a densely populated urban grey.

And still people come, despite the floods. Besides the rural-urban drift, there is a stream of poor migrants from surrounding lands. Dakar is a magnet for many and the uncontrolled suburbs are where they head. For most, there is no other option.

Dakar's development shows why, in the decades to come, rapid urban growth will present enormous challenges. Already, 72 per cent of all those who live in sub-Saharan cities – some 200 million people – live in slums, shanty towns and irregular suburbs without infrastructure or services.

The World Bank is discussing a proposal to move Pikine's population to another location. It may be the only solution. But Ahmadou Niassa warns that the suburb will continue to attract migrants.

"If you move the present population, rural migrants will take their place. You can raze it to the ground but others will simply rebuild there," he says. "How can you stop the people coming?" That, many believe, is the crucial question.

Strengthening rural economies, shoring up agriculture and improving countryside living conditions are some of the issues mooted. Meanwhile, Dakar's population is thought to be growing by an annual rate of 7 to 8 per cent. Of that, only 2 to 3 per cent represents natural growth – such is the scale of the drift.

.....
*Source: International Federation field interviews

it may rain but it will make little difference to me. Either way, it will be a disaster." Those goats that had survived the drought would simply die in the water.

"We either have too little or we have far too much."

The farmers tell the same story in Namibia, where the worst floods for 50 years overwhelmed the Caprivi region. In 2009, they wiped out an anticipated bumper harvest.

Alongside such natural hazards has now come a man-made one: the global economic crisis. When it began in the developed world conventional wisdom said Africa would be little affected. The crisis has been slow to arrive but, today, it is severe and gaining momentum. Among other things, in economies that are dependent on agriculture, it has deepened the impact on food security.

The downturn can be seen in declining prices and falling demand for commodities, cutting export revenues. Foreign investment has slowed along with the flow of remittances – a key support for many poor people. And foreign reserves have run low, jeopardizing the import of basic goods like food, medical supplies and agricultural inputs.

As mines and companies close, livelihoods disappear with them; and a development crisis fast becomes a humanitarian one.

The UN estimates that the proportion of undernourished Africans rose by 29 per cent in 2008, whilst the World Bank calculates that the number living in poverty is likely to have increased by 16 million in the year to mid-2009.

Humanitarian action

Summary: Funding for humanitarian aid is failing to keep pace with growing humanitarian need, and a disproportionate amount is being spent on reactive relief. Only a fraction is spent on attempts to reduce vulnerabilities.



In terms of disasters and food insecurity, humanitarian assistance largely comes after the event. Most resources are used to ease the pain inflicted by catastrophic events, and this model of response already buckles beneath the weight of need in Africa.

It does not need to. The simple truth is that the model can be improved: assistance can be provided in a much better and more effective way, and needs can be reduced.

It is not that the world is uncaring – it is actually exceedingly generous. The figures speak for themselves. In 2008, US\$ 119.8 billion was spent globally on official development assistance (ODA). This falls short of targets set by governments in 2005, but it represents a 10 per cent increase on 2007⁶.

Analysis of aid is available elsewhere, but what we must stress here is that ODA is stable and perhaps growing. The same is true for the amount of that aid allocated to humanitarian assistance.

But here comes the crunch. It is failing to keep pace with growing needs.

Take a recent illustration from the World Food Programme (WFP). In 2009, the organization reported that funding for its food security operations in the Horn of Africa had actually increased in recent years, but not at a pace that matched the amount it was appealing for⁷.

So, while donors reach deeper into their pockets than they have ever done before, aid levels in real terms still fall behind in Africa. The structure of funding also needs to be examined.

ODA can be split into two distinct categories:

- humanitarian – assistance given to those who experience acute suffering
- development – assistance typically directed towards governments to build and strengthen social and physical infrastructure, such as health and education systems

According to one recent estimate, only 7.5 per cent of ODA goes towards providing humanitarian assistance. And while specific figures for Africa are difficult to ascertain, global figures clearly show that funding is heavily biased towards reactive assistance. Only a minuscule amount is invested in proactive attempts to reduce vulnerabilities: 0.14 per cent of ODA⁸.

The disparity is further revealed in a US government estimate that three-quarters of Africa's food assistance is directed towards meeting emergency needs. Far more effort must be made to reach people before they are in the grip of hunger or disaster devastates their lives.

We are not arguing that funding to procure and distribute food should be re-directed. Food aid saves lives as it does today in the wider Horn of Africa. Right now, whole communities depend on it. Without it, many more will undoubtedly die, but many could have been spared their present situation.

Just 0.14 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) is directed towards disaster risk reduction.

6. United Nations. *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*. New York, 2009.

7. SABC International. *African Views*. Johannesburg, 13 August 2009.

8. Oxfam. *Band Aids and Beyond: Tackling disasters in Ethiopia 25 years after the famine*. London, 22 October 2009. Available at www.oxfam.org.uk

BOX 3
INVESTING IN
ASSETS¹

The animals – the ones that haven't been herded into Somalia in the hope of finding coastal rains and a semblance of pasture – are dead or dying. The carcasses of goats shrivel in the heat of the day.

"Today it is the animals. Tomorrow we will follow," says a woman in Jilango, a settlement of former pastoralists, 100 kilometres north-west of Garissa in Kenya's North Eastern Province.

It is a common sentiment in this underdeveloped, bone-dry corner of the country, where a permanent state of chronic crisis is largely disregarded. Only when crisis evolves into a full-blown disaster does substantial intervention follow. Once the emergency is over, the people return to crisis.

Jilango is a settlement of 5,000 people and semi-permanent dwellings in Modogashe division. Since the late 1990s, it has grown from nothing as more and more pastoralists have abandoned a nomadic life. Deprived of traditional pastures by an increasingly extreme climate, they have settled here to supplement their livelihood with farming. The land, they say,

is fertile. "If we had water, anything could grow here – millet, sorghum, beans, water melon – but we've had no rain to speak of for about three years," says Ahamad Dagan, a community elder.

The Kenya Red Cross Society is helping them harvest the rain that does fall. Rather than simply providing relief, food is distributed as payment for work that has a long-term community benefit. A food-for-assets approach or, as the Red Cross prefers to call it, a protracted relief and recovery operation – those who cannot work receive food as well – it mobilizes the population, provides know-how and shows them that there is hope.

The asset in Jilango is a 5,000-cubic-metre water pan that, when finished, could hold a three- or four-month supply, enough to see the community through the usual dry period between rains.

It is a tough challenge, though. Although the Red Cross provides tools and technical advice, work has come to a halt. The able-bodied men are in Somalia with the last of the cattle, and the old, the weak and the women who remain can

dig no more in the rock-hard earth.

They have done their best, working at night so as not to lose energy in the daytime heat. Ahamad holds up a broken shovel. "See?" he says and shakes his head. The reservoir must wait until rain softens the ground. When the younger men return, they will finish it, he explains.

"We'll not stop with this pan, either. There will have to be others if we want to make the most of farming. We have the tools now, and the experience, and we know of other suitable places."

Mohamed Abdinoor, head of disaster management with the Kenya Red Cross Society, says a recovery component has become part and parcel of all the National Society's disaster responses. "Disaster risk reduction has to be part of all our work. You must engage the community in what you do as well. There must be community ownership."

It is why the Red Cross continues to invest in volunteers, who are active in their own communities, and trains them in community disaster management.

¹Source: International Federation field interviews

Far more effort must be made to reach people before they are in the grip of hunger or disaster devastates their lives.

Similarly, people affected by floods or other disasters need tarpaulins over their heads to shelter them from the elements, or mosquito nets to protect them from harmful bites.

How much better, though, to remove them from harm's way or help them to minimize the impact, before the event even occurs. We have both the knowledge and the technology to do this.

Crucially, comparatively little work is being done to help communities reduce or eliminate their vulnerabilities. Once the food aid comes to an end or the displacement camps shut down, people typically return to the same precarious situation that contributed to the original problem. Across the continent, an ongoing cycle of crisis–relief–crisis is being played out.

There is too little of enduring value, too little to break the vicious circle. As one East African Red Cross coordinator puts it, all that food aid leaves behind are full latrines. "Africa deserves better than that."

Many communities live on the brink of crisis. Periodically they slip in and out of it and, on occasion, collapse into emergency. To minimize future human suffering, we must do more than just address the need in front of us today. We must also strengthen the livelihoods of those affected so they can cope with the adverse conditions they will inevitably face tomorrow.

Livelihoods-based support can both address immediate needs and build resilience to future crisis. Activities that support a family's means of income, their coping strategies, their natural resource base – such as water and watershed,

BOX 4 BEYOND FOOD RELIEFS¹

What will happen in December when the food relief ends? The question preoccupies villagers in the Foni Bintang district of the Gambia's Western Region. They fear a hard life will soon become even harder.

Food shortages have long been a major concern. Drought, soil erosion and floods have all played a role. Low food production is caused, in part, by rural-urban migration, which has reduced the labour force. Pressure on land has further depleted food stocks, and poor soil fertility has resulted in low yields.

The farmers' problems deepened with the arrival of refugees escaping conflict in neighbouring Casamance, in southern Senegal. The refugees were no strangers to the region. Foni Bintang lies on the border and the Jola tribe lives on either side. The newcomers sought shelter among Gambian friends and relatives. Around 5,400 have been welcomed, but sharing land, water and assets with them has placed a huge burden on their hosts.

If the district is in crisis it isn't visible among the waving rice fields of Bajagarr village. With seeds, tools and advice

from the Gambia Red Cross Society, a fine crop has been grown on the 15 hectares in spite of adverse weather conditions.

Rain had been poor the past couple of years and when the African Centre for Meteorological Applications for Development forecast less than half the normal precipitation for 2009 – all in the early part of the season – the villagers took Red Cross advice and planted an early ripening crop.

Other communities followed suit. Bajagarr is one of 47 communities to benefit from a food-for-work project in which the World Food Programme and UNHCR have worked alongside the Red Cross to assist both refugees and hosts. As a result, rice, maize and groundnuts have all been successfully harvested.

It has not been enough to allay concerns about the end of food aid, but progress is undeniable. Such investment builds assets within a community, strengthens resilience and can reduce the risk of disaster, explains Katim Nget, programme manager with the Gambia Red Cross Society. Statistics highlight the programme's importance. Poverty in

the Gambia remains a predominantly rural phenomenon affecting half the countryside's population. Almost 35 per cent of rural households fall below the poverty line, compared with 15 per cent in urban areas and 4 per cent in and around the capital. About 91 per cent of the extremely poor work in agriculture.

Poverty also drives the rural-urban drift and the ills of rapid urbanization can already be seen in the capital. As in Dakar, Senegal, Banjul's suburbs are overcrowded and demand for land is so great that people settle in risk-prone areas.

This uncontrolled urban spread is exposed to annual floods. In Ebo Town, which is built on former rice fields, the elderly Yousupha Kebbeh (pictured) stares through a door from his sick bed to ankle-deep stagnant water. He is a farmer who abandoned rural hardship for the promise of urban improvement and was one of the first to build here during drought years a quarter of a century ago. His home today is an insanitary slum. He did not escape poverty. Will the farmers who follow him find the same?

¹Source: International Federation field interviews

BOX 5 WATER IS LIFE¹

A TALE OF TWO VILLAGES

The village of Kyanunbu in Kenya's Eastern Province is dying. It once depended on animals and agriculture, but now most of the livestock is dead and the once productive fields last delivered a decent harvest in 2002. Drought is strangling Kyanunbu and its inhabitants have given up hope.

The young and able-bodied have begun to leave, heading for Nairobi and other urban areas looking for work.

Mwingi district, in which the village lies, is in crisis and the government's latest drought bulletin catalogues why. Access to water is desperate. There is overcrowding at the handful of boreholes and walking distances to water points is increasing. As cattle die, cattle prices fall, milk production is at an all-time low, which in turn affects milk consumption, and 15 per cent of children are at risk of malnutrition. Already more than 60 per cent of the population depends on food relief but, as the bulletin warns, to avert starvation and death, food distribution must be given top priority.

In Kyanunbu, everyone already depends on food relief. Beatrice Muthui says her family once farmed ten acres and produced maize, millet, sorghum, beans and cowpeas. Today, the landscape is seared. The farm produces nothing, the goats have been sold to buy staples and all but two cows from a herd of ten have perished.

Nearby water sources have also dried up and Beatrice, who has five children, walks seven kilometres with a donkey to fetch water from a shallow well in a dry river bed. She makes the 14-kilometre round trip every day, sometimes twice a day.

In the village of Katuluni, grandmother Josephine Mwalale also has bone-dry land and all that remains of her livestock are five skeletal goats. Yesterday, she trudged to a market with one of her goats. Then she trudged back with the beast unsold. No one wanted to buy such a poor specimen.

Her situation may be precarious, but it has improved. Josephine used to walk even further than Beatrice for her water – 12 kilometres to the nearest shallow well. It nearly killed her, she says, and it helped

kill many of the village donkeys. Starved for lack of fodder, exhausted by the loads they carried, they simply succumbed to the inevitable.

Josephine now gets her water from a village kiosk, one of a chain spread along a 13-kilometre Kenya Red Cross Society pipeline. Running from a borehole, it first targeted 7,000 people, but is now serving 20,000 people up to 20 kilometres away, whose local sources have dried up.

Josephine says, "Without it we'd have died with the donkeys." The project – paid for by a Kenya Red Cross Society corporate supporter – provides more than just relief. It's a sustainable solution that has removed a huge burden, reduced vulnerability and brought hope to many. Moreover, it's a financially prudent alternative to the expensive method of trucking water to people in need. It requires a one-off serious investment, but is extremely cost effective in the long term. The people it serves are more than happy to pay a small contribution to cover the cost of maintenance.

¹Source: International Federation field interviews



Livelihoods-based support can both address immediate needs and build resilience to future crisis.

pasture and farmland – their productive assets, and their basic services or infrastructure, can all improve food security.

The need for assistance to evolve in this direction was signalled by the International Federation's adoption of its long-term African food security strategy in 2008, and is equally reflected in the development of economic security programmes by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

There isn't enough money, and what is available is not being spent as well as it should. What will happen, then, as humanitarian needs continue to grow?

Tomorrow's challenges

In recent months, a number of humanitarian organizations have attempted to quantify the impact of climate change on communities in developing countries. It is widely expected that food insecurity and disasters will increase in frequency and intensity, and that already unstable seasonal trends will become less and less predictable.

The hammer is expected to fall particularly hard on Africa. In terms of agriculture, drought-affected areas in sub-Saharan Africa could expand by 60 to 90 million hectares, contributing to decreased productivity in almost all countries. The acute vulnerability felt below the Sahara strip is likely to get worse. Lean years – years where rains fail and soil dries out – could become twice as common, dramatically affecting the livelihoods of millions of African farmers and pastoralists.

Even in comparatively food secure North Africa, average food consumption could drop by 4.4 per cent over the next ten years – and by as much as 15 per cent in Egypt⁹.

Africa is also expected to be hardest hit by shifting disaster trends. Relatively predictable flood and drought cycles have changed. Rainfall trends are also changing. Whilst these have been witnessed in recent years, they are expected to become the norm.

As disasters increase and hunger spreads, the trend towards urbanization is also expected to continue. The number of people living in Africa's slums is predicted to double again by 2020, taking the figure in sub-Saharan Africa alone to 400 million.

9. Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), June 2009.

BOX 6
BRIDGING
THE SCIENCE
GAP¹

Floods. Drought. Locust invasions. Epidemics. These are the big four disaster challenges in West and Central Africa, and all four are climate related. The climate either unleashes them or creates the conditions in which they occur.

This is why climate science is high on Youcef Ait-Chellouche's agenda. As the International Federation's disaster management coordinator in the region, he wants to know what the scientists know. "They need to understand what our requirements as disaster managers are," he says. It was for this reason that the International Federation's office in Dakar, Senegal, has formed partnerships with the scientific community.

"We deal with the consequences of things climatologists and meteorologists study. Take floods. There had to be someone out there who understood what makes them hap-

pen," he says. "So we knocked on a door and someone said: "Yes, I know about floods and what will happen next year." There was clearly a need to bridge the gap between scientists and humanitarians."

Partnerships with authorities such as the International Research Institute for Climate and Society at New York's Columbia University and the African Centre for Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD) are paying dividends. In May, seasonal forecasts inform the International Federation's zone office of what to expect in the July–September rainy season (see the section entitled 'Solutions'). The information, shared with partners, is passed to Red Cross National Societies and then on to their network of branches and local volunteers, who are trained to warn and prepare communities. Updates, shorter-term forecasts and alerts follow.

It is still early days. According to Youcef, "The dialogue has only just started and forecasts should be tailored to the user's requirements. Humanitarians are asking for a specific product."

There are challenges in getting information to where it is needed fast, for example, to wandering pastoralists whose livelihoods are affected by drought. Where pasture can be found depends on where rain will fall and in the short term Youcef has that information. He's now looking for a way to reach the pastoralists most effectively and pass this information on.

"The opportunities are there to link disaster response to risk reduction. That's what it's all about. That's the challenge and the scientists can help us."

¹Source: International Federation field interviews

Solutions

Summary: *Examples of effective risk reduction and community-level development exist. These must be used as the seeds for future risk-aware development. Risk reduction limits suffering and saves money. Science can help humanitarian action.*



Thus far, this report has painted a pessimistic picture. Humanitarian needs in Africa today are severe and are set to worsen. The humanitarian response by and large addresses these needs after the fact. Such assistance is, of course, crucial to the immediate saving of lives, but the structural, underlying reasons for the vulnerability of communities are rarely addressed.

It addresses symptoms rather than causes.

This section outlines a way forward for humanitarian action and funding. Ultimately, more work and more money must be directed towards building community resilience so that vulnerable people can face, overcome and thrive in the wake of the challenges confronting them. The good news? The way forward can be marked by existing successes.

A flood only becomes a disaster when the community it affects is unable to cope with it. Similarly, chronic food insecurity isn't a natural result of drought. Rather, it reflects a failure to adequately prepare. Wells can be dug, irrigation schemes can be developed, and drought-resistant crops can be planted.



Food and Malawi

As the Southern Africa Trust has argued, boosting smallholder farming can ease hunger and reduce poverty at household level¹⁰.

In 2005, pervasive drought meant that 5 million Malawians didn't have access to sufficient food. Today, Malawi has begun to show the way forward. This year, the country's government announced a food surplus of 1.3 million tons¹¹. A national agricultural input subsidy programme has been introduced and the Malawi Red Cross Society – whose partners include the ministries of agriculture and food security, irrigation and water development, and health, and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs – has planted further seeds of hope at community level.

Salima district, to the east of the administrative capital, Lilongwe, is highly susceptible to severe flooding and drought. The impact can be devastating on communities who have limited means to recover quickly from loss of property and livelihoods. The Red Cross has targeted five communities (50,000 people) with preparedness, response and rehabilitation to protect life and livelihoods, property and livestock.

Even three years ago, the people of Chiziwa, Maganga, were dependent on food aid as their maize crops failed in successive harvests. Today, however, simple, sustainable irrigation methods and improved planting have already turned the lives of many villagers around, and many more will follow suit if start-up investment continues.

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¹⁰. Southern Africa Trust. *Seeds of Plenty: How boosting smallholder farming can ease hunger and reduce poverty at the household level in southern Africa*. Johannesburg, August 2009. Available at www.southernafricatrust.org/docs/Policy_Brief_4_August2009.pdf

¹¹. Agence France Presse (AFP). *Impoverished Malawi claims record maize harvest*. 23 June 2009.

In Kabumbu, Maganga, the Red Cross aims to provide farmers with an option on the riverbank fields they have been forced to cultivate because of soil erosion elsewhere. With changing weather patterns, floods have become a yearly disaster, picking up the soil from the land they ravage and dumping it as rich alluvial deposits close to lakes and riverbanks as the waters recede. But much of what the farmers grow there is destroyed when the floods return and many good crops are never harvested.

Beyond the reach of the water, the Red Cross located good land previously considered unattractive because it had been too dry. Higher up, however, it had something else seemingly in abundant supply: wind. **A wind-powered irrigation scheme** was designed and, today, electricity, generated by a turbine, pumps water from a borehole to adjacent fields. When finalized, the Red Cross calculates that half the crop would be sufficient to feed the community, and the other half could be sold.

Before that occurs, one unforeseen obstacle must be overcome: wind, another consequence of changing weather patterns. Wind has become irregular and the data from Malawi's meteorological department, on which the scheme was based, is no longer valid. The power supply cannot be guaranteed to water more than a portion of the land. The answer is to use **solar power to bridge the gap when the winds falter**. The cost of buying and installing solar equipment would be US\$ 13,000.

This is the price of a sustainable solution. By comparison, based on the cost of a standard parcel, US\$ 13,000 would only provide supplementary food relief for 10,000 people for just over a week¹².

Kenya and food

In Kenya – in the midst of a food crisis – there are other rays of hope.

In Jarajara, in north-eastern Balambala division, the Red Cross is working to resurrect and extend farmland deserted by the Tana river when it changed course in the 1997 El Niño flooding. A government-built canal that runs from the now distant river to a state vocational training camp already supports some local irrigated farming, but not enough to make much difference in these increasingly troubled times. The Red Cross is **constructing a canal extension to irrigate sufficient land** so that the people of Jarajara can work towards food security. The ultimate goal is self-sufficiency: enough food for their own consumption and for cash crops.

In a desiccated region that has been ignored by successive governments there is already an oasis where farmers harvest rice and graze animals on the remaining stalks. There are now a handful of farmers who can let rice run through their fingers in celebration of a harvest. However, a few kilometres away, people are hungry and the corpses of their livestock lie rotting. The Red Cross canal extension is a pilot project. If successful, it could be replicated elsewhere along the Tana river, easing the plight of others in north-eastern Kenya.

The Red Cross premise is to look for opportunity and to develop it. Sometimes, as in Jarajara, an existing resource can be strengthened, but where vulnerability exists, the mission must be to look for community capacity.

¹². Based on a standard cost of US\$ 25 per family of five per month.

**BOX 7
DISASTER RISK
REDUCTION
IN AFRICA¹**

A recent mapping of Red Cross Red Crescent disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes found that at least 13.5 million vulnerable people around the world are being reached in 2009 with disaster risk reduction programmes – which also includes food security, livelihoods and climate change adaptation activities. The total reported estimated spending on these activities in 2009 was 68.1 million Swiss francs, which approximates to about five Swiss francs per beneficiary.

Africa has experienced the most marked increase in the portion of global DRR spending during the past few years, with just over 20 per cent of the global spending in 2004, to just under 40 per cent in 2009. The table below shows the 2009 regional breakdown

of global DRR spending compared to indicators of disaster risk (shown by disaster history) and human vulnerability (shown by poverty data).

Almost 60 per cent of the 2005–2009 funding for DRR was provided by government donors. Spending in all DRR focus areas has increased during the past five years. Food security and livelihoods has increased most rapidly, especially starting in 2007, which is linked to the launch of the Africa Food Security Initiative. With the impact of climate change becoming more and more apparent, spending on climate change adaptation has also consistently increased.

DRR activities will continue to grow, with over 44.6 million Swiss francs already committed for 2010. The number

of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies implementing such activities has increased from 80 (serving 9.3 million people) in 2008 to 113 by 2009, showing growing understanding, commitment and support for ensuring community safety and resilience.

¹Source: internal International Federation records and reports.

²EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database. Accessed at www.emdat.be, October 2009. Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium.

³World Bank (2008). 2008 World Development Indicators: Poverty Data Supplement. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington, DC. The global absolute poverty line is estimated at US\$1.25/day.

	Global DRR Spending	Global Disasters 1900-2009 ²	Population <\$1.25/day (millions) ³
Africa	38%	24%	393
Americas	15%	21%	47
Asia Pacific	41%	43%	923
Europe	5%	7%	24
MENA	1%	5%	8

Mozambique and disasters

In 2001, floods in Mozambique displaced hundreds of thousands of people and claimed 1,700 lives. Communities were simply unprepared when the floodwater came without warning.

Since then, the Mozambican government – working closely with the Mozambique Red Cross Society and UN agencies – **has established an early-warning system**. Now, communities are aware in advance of approaching floods or storms. And, crucially, they know what to do.

The role of Red Cross volunteers is to work with communities to prepare evacuation plans and practice drills so that when the now ubiquitous coloured flags are raised, and when a Red Cross volunteer marches through town with a megaphone, plans can immediately swing into action.

The impact is significant. In 2008, when water rushed down the Zambezi river, communities evacuated in advance. Some 40 people were killed, a fraction of the 2001 death toll.

This success is now being used as a basis for the Zambezi River Basin Initiative. The Red Cross Societies of the seven countries that share the Zambezi have come together to establish similar early-warning systems along the river. But it doesn't stop there. The initiative is also designed to help communities better understand the threats that they face and take proactive steps to mitigate them.

The Zambezi Initiative builds also on the experiences of the African National Societies that share East Africa's Lake Victoria. These National Societies came together under the Lake Victoria Programme to address the vulnerability and build the capacity of communities living around the continent's largest lake.

The role of donors

The methodologies exist. The challenge now is to expand and mainstream disaster risk reduction and community-level development. Here, donors have a crucial role to play.

Humanitarian funds must be actively and structurally directed towards disaster risk reduction programming. Risk reduction can no longer be seen as just an aspect of humanitarian assistance. Instead, **it needs to become the driving philosophy behind how disasters are addressed.** The IFRC calls on governments to dedicate a significant proportion of the funds they spend on disaster response towards risk reduction and community-level development.

But this is only part of the solution.

Funding structures remain polarized between humanitarian and development budget lines. This rigid separation makes it difficult for agencies to design and deliver programmes that are problem-orientated rather than classification driven.

Development is not separate from humanitarian need. Disasters and food insecurity often are the result of bad or non-existent development.

This gap needs to shrink if not disappear. There needs to be better coordination between allocations from development and humanitarian budgets. One way to do this is to invest in Red Cross Red Crescent programmes that seek to go beyond emergency assistance – activities that strive to link disaster response to recovery and risk-aware development.

Investing in institutional capacity

The examples cited above show clearly the impact of effective and dynamic community-level action. They are also examples that were driven by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies exist in almost every country on the continent. Through their network of volunteers – volunteers that are drawn from the very communities that they serve – they are also present in most villages and towns.

As independent auxiliaries to their governments, they are uniquely placed to support national efforts to proactively reduce vulnerability and drive development.

However, to meet their mandate, they require additional support from donors – both African and international – to build and reinforce their own leadership, systems, infrastructure and delivery capacities.



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The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

Hunger, disaster, hope: *humanitarian action in Africa*

A publication from the International Federation of
Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



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