

FAMINE AND HOPE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

by David Eshihuula

Kenya is located in Sub-Saharan Africa and part of the Horn of Africa. Despite widespread poverty and hunger, Kenya is my home and there is no place like home for me. I love Kenya because it is so unique. Its uniqueness is what makes me love it. Anywhere you hear of “poverty” you hear of Africa. Kenya is in Africa. There is poverty in Kenya today. There is no doubt about it. The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis caused by



famine sweeping through the Horn of Africa came home to me after the United Nations said it needed about Kes. 20 billion to feed the hungry in Kenya! Up to 2.4 million Kenyans face death by starvation after drought that destroyed their water sources and livestock. So serious is this crisis that the UN warns it might reverse a huge chunk of the gains made over the last years in lowering death among children.

A United Nations report titled “Kenya Humanitarian Situation Report” from research carried out from July 13 to July 22, 2011 indicates that rain failure has resulted in eroding stocks that had been realized in the year 2009/2010 leading to people in Eastern Kenya totally depleting their resources. The report says three consecutive seasons of failed rains could be the reason why famine has hit the country hard “Some parts of Kenya have faced two or three successive poor rainy season, eroding gains made after the 2009/2010 Elnino rains.”

The report indicates that 2.4 million people are currently in need of food but that number could increase to 3.5 million by end of August.



THE INFANT GRAVES OF DADAAB

Dadaab, the largest refugee camp in the world according to UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon, is overcrowded with some 380,000 Somali refugees. Seven million more Kenyans and Ethiopians also need food assistance. The Horn of Africa could lose a generation as children go hungry and are denied food for developing brains. Many of the women in Dadaab have lost their children and they had no one to depend upon but the humanitarian agencies. According to the Kenya Red Cross Society the country's malnutrition rate among children under the age of five is at the alarming threshold of almost 30 percent.

According to the media many women trek long distances in search of food and water, with their malnourished children, through what is now known as the “roads of death”.



Some mothers have had to make the horrifying choice of saving the strongest of their children while leaving the weakest behind to die, as starving families make the long, desperate trek from Somalia to the refugee camps across the border in search of food aid.

Hundreds die on their way to the remote camps and others upon arrival. Some of the refugees trek nearly 400 kilometers across Somalia, skirting bandits along the way and enduring blisters and massive headaches. They travel under the hot sun and dodge death by rebel bullets and suffer complete exhaustion.



WAITING AT THE GATES OF DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP

The images of children clutching empty breasts, looking thin and emaciated, are sorrowful. The sullen faces of mothers struggling to live another day are disturbing. Children cry weakly for anything, even a leaf to assuage a bit of their hunger. For one minute can you imagine the pain of watching your son, daughter, wife, husband, mother, father, sister, brother or neighbor wilting away day after day, knowing he or she is dying because they have not eaten or drunk for days?

This is the scenario at Dadaab. Everyday hundreds of refugees arrive at the Dadaab



refuge complex after walking for weeks through the desolate terrain to escape drought and a brutal civil war in Somalia. More than 1,300 refugees arrive at the camp everyday, but workers do not have the means to

provide everyone with the help they so desperately need, leaving 17,000 currently waiting at the complex gate.

REFUGEES LIVING IN A CARCASS DUMPING FIELD

It is known as Bula baqti, Somali for the place of carcass. The field has been a dumpsite for dumping dead bodies and livestock. Not anymore. It is now teeming with 22,000 Somali refugees crossing the border to Kenya from the ravaging drought and insecurity in their country. This dumpsite has become another refuge for



thousands fleeing the twin catastrophe of drought and famine but who cannot get a place in the designated camps that are already full. Some feed on dead animal carcasses. Aid workers are overwhelmed.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

It is not only the North Eastern part of Kenya that is experiencing hunger and starvation. There are many other parts of Kenya that are worse hit by the drought. Other parts in Kenya hit hard by the drought are Baringo North, Baringo Central , Turkana, Samburu, Lodwar, Loruk, Ngaratuko, Chepkewel, Yatia, Makutani, Kiserian Araban and North Pokot.

See below the photo of the 80 year old disabled Turkana woman whose sunken cheeks, shriveled skin, sagging breasts and poor eyesight came to symbolize the ravage of famine in the media. Her picture spoke volumes about the cruelty of life in the far flung famine spot described in the media. It also highlighted the misery and squalor of life around her. She died, like many others who have succumbed to starvation including children. She died before help reached her. Her emaciated frame was captured in the media. She had gone without food for days. Her body is lying in a shallow grave- that is if hungry hyenas and dogs have not pulled her from it. There were probably no eulogies, no coffin and certainly no epitaph .A few tears may have flowed among her loved ones and that was all. An ignominious end to a sad tale. The tale of the departed Louwa is a microcosm of the tragedy that has hit the forgotten Turkana people of Kenya.



IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

International relief agencies and NGO's are overwhelmed. There is not enough medicine and medical equipment. **The refugee complex is vast and needs more dedicated people to alleviate the human suffering here and lend a comforting ear.** You can help by donating funds to Suitcases for Africa. **They are working to raise awareness of a new Canadian Government Program that will match individual donors dollar for dollar. Funds you donate to SFA will fund emergency food in their targeted communities suffering hunger. With this Program, the government will match the funds of SFA donors and then the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will distribute the same amount to go directly to reach the children and mothers in anguish in the Dadaab camps as quickly as possible. Suitcases for Africa has been at the forefront of providing emergency food aid and relief to vulnerable people in the Western part of Kenya.** They have now taken the next step to partner with CIDA in fighting hunger and starvation. It is my kind and humble request to you to intervene and change the lives of these children. They are the parents of tomorrow. Save their lives, bring them out of poverty and sorrow.

LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

The East African dry lands are described as areas where if rain falls it is so meager as to be functionally meaningless, or so powerful that it carries everything with it. The little water available in these lands is saline, black or unhygienic forcing its



residents to travel several kilometers daily in search of water, food and pasture for their animals.

Initiatives are needed to improve lives of these vulnerable populations

through engaging in projects that boost animals' production, infrastructure, health education and business.

Dry lands typically earn the lowest scores on indices of human development and life there is a constant struggle against a deteriorating environment. Such initiatives will help bring dispossessed communities into the mainstream development through reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) simultaneously.

Secondly, apart from extreme droughts, new study based evidence shows that the very inputs used to boost food production are now responsible for reducing productivity by more than 500 per cent in areas that were once regarded as food basket producing areas.

It is evident that farm mechanization, increased use of fertilizers and planting of hybrid seeds have underpinned huge increase in the Kenya's agriculture output over the past 40 years. But there is evidence that some of these technologies and inputs have also destroyed the soils, hence the need for farmers especially maize growers to consult experts.

Early findings from a study being conducted by scientists from the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) shows that one of the major causes of low maize yield in western Kenya is soil acidity. The soils require liming. Liming can be done once every three years to neutralize the acidity. These are areas that require urgent funding so that soils can regain their productivity to sustain meaningful agriculture. Right now we must act to feed the starving and then we can tackle the long term for sustainability of food production. Thank you for your help.

Yours Faithfully, David Eshihuula

Sources: www.standardmedia.co.ke

www.nation.co.ke