

East Africa Food Security Crisis – an overview of what we knew and when before June 2011

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This paper provides an overview of the current Food Security Crisis (see Figure 1) in East Africa and the early warning and information systems in place covering this geographical area. Additionally, it aims to answer 2 questions:

- Did these early warning and information systems (EW/I-Systems) provide accurate and timely information that could predict the scale of the crisis?
- If not, what information gaps were there?

This paper does not seek to *explain* whether the humanitarian response was timely, nor does it analyse if the response was not timely, the reasons behind (for example, lack of access/insecurity, political will, financial means).

Key facts

- 2011 is the driest period in the Eastern Horn of Africa since 1995: There is no improvement expected until early 2012.¹
- The worst affected countries are Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and possibly parts of Uganda, northern Tanzania, South Sudan.
- The number of people in acute livelihood crisis are estimated at 8.8 – 10 million and increase is expected in the coming months.^{1, 2}
- Due to La Niña Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia received low and late arrival of the long pastoral rains (normally March-May) in 2011 and the rainfall was insufficient to sustain human and livestock water consumption and regenerate pasture until the next rainy season (expected in October 2011): river levels in Somalia said to be at historic minimums.^{3, 4}
- Overall food security conditions across pastoral and marginal agricultural areas will continue to deteriorate in the coming 3 to 4 months, with expectation of late and below-average summer harvests and early depletion of pasture and water as well as aggravating factors, such as³:
 - Continued high prices of food, water and fuel
 - Unfavourable terms of trade for pastoralists as livestock conditions and production deteriorate
 - Localised outbreaks of contagious livestock diseases (Foot and Mouth Disease) accelerated by increased cross-border population migrations in the region
 - Localised crop diseases (e.g. wheat yellow rust, banana wilt)
 - Displacement due to conflict

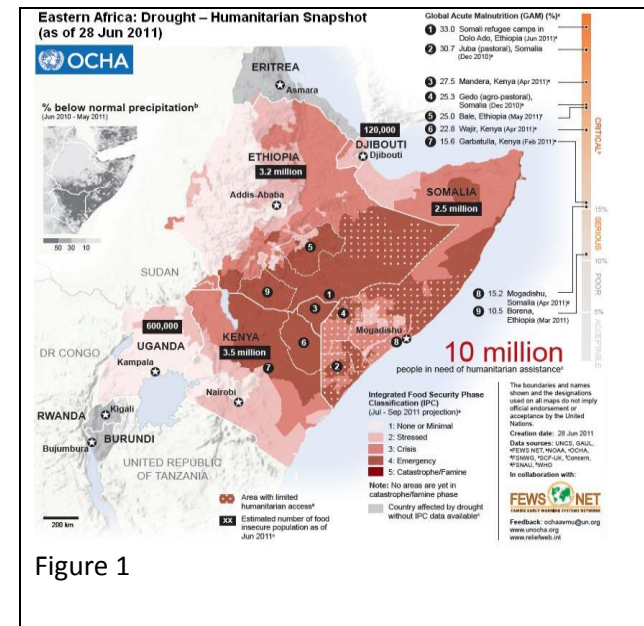


Figure 1

- Population displacement due to the drought and conflict is alarming: 135,000 Somalis fled so far this year. In June 2011, 54,000 people fled across the borders into Kenya and Ethiopia (3x number of people who fled in May 2011). Rates of arrivals are estimated at 1,700 refugees per day⁵ in Ethiopia and 1,400 refugees Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp complex.⁶
- Malnutrition rates are very high among the most recent arrivals. At least 50 per cent of Somali children arriving in Ethiopia are malnourished (moderately or severely). Childhood malnutrition in arriving refugees in Kenya is estimated at 30-40%.⁶ However, children living in the drought affected areas in Kenya also have high rates of malnutrition.⁷
- Funding gaps have been reported in all major sectors, particularly in Nutrition, WASH and Livelihoods; humanitarian country teams are revising their response plans and funding requirements to account for the deteriorating situation¹.

Methodology

A selection of the main information systems was made that provide food security (FS) related information and early warnings. These systems were analysed on data available since August 2010 and focus was given to information concerning weather, livelihoods, price information, trade/markets, hazards, malnutrition rates and agriculture. Specific attention was given on information that aimed to predict a humanitarian crises as has developed today .

The focus was on systems providing information on East Africa as a *region*, rather than *national* EW/I-Systems. This report did not analyse information systems managed by governments (i.e. national) nor single agencies except for World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) because they are assuming a specific role in disaster predictions related to Food Security.

This report did not evaluate whether information *transfer* systems such as ReliefWeb (OCHA), IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network, OCHA), Alertnet (Reuters), disasters-reduction-net picked up the emerging FS crisis in time. The quality of the information these *transfer* systems use on FS is often dependent on the original source (as listed in Table 1). Whether organisations consulted timely the information available through the EW/I-Systems, was not reviewed.

Who provides which information on Food Security?

The main EW/I-Systems covering the relevant geographical area are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Early Warning and Information systems in East Africa related to Food Security

Organisation name	Actors	Geographical area of coverage 2010-2011						Type of FS related Information 2010-2011							Information format and frequency		
		Djibouti	Ethiopia	Kenya	Somalia	Uganda	East Africa	Livelihood	Price info	Trade/Markets	Malnutrition	Weather/climate	Agriculture	Hazards drought, floods		Food Insecurity Alerts	
FEWSNET: Famine Early Warning Systems Network	USAID: FEWSNET staff and partner organisations	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	Special reports and FS/ alerts (depending on severity), Food Assistance Outlook (monthly), Price watch (monthly)
FSNWG: Food Security and Nutrition Working Group	Group of NGOs, UN, RC/RC, early warning + information systems (technically supported by FAO)						•										FSNWG Update on Central & East Africa (more or less monthly)
		Predominantly regional information on East Africa but with some details of the relevant countries						•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
IPC: Intergrated Food Security Phase Classification	National and regional (at each level multi-agency and national governments and forums) In East/Central Africa region: IPC is supported by the IPC steering committee of the FSNWG.	-	-	•	•	•	•										Maps with current situation and trends (biannual) for Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and East Africa Special briefs/updates on Uganda (irregular), Somalia (quarterly) (d) see FSNWG
		The East Africa regional information is provided by FSNWG. The IPC for Somalia is called FSNAU (Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit Somalia). For Kenya and Uganda there national IPC working groups.						Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda	Somalia, Uganda		

GIEWS: Global Information and Early Warning and Information System	FAO (work can be jointly done with WFP)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	Crop Prospects and Food Situation (trimestrial) Special reports (dependent on emerging crisis)(often after CFSAM: Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission) . Food Outlook (biannual) Global Food Price Monitor (monthly)
		All information is available but some times in different reports															
WFP website with all Food Security analysis/assessments reports	WFP	-	• (c)	• (a)	• (a)	• (b)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) reports (b); Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) reports (WFP and FAO), Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) reports, Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) reports (a), Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) reports is conducted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP, Regular inter-agency reports (c) ³ , (All irregular publications, depending on severity)	
		Depending on report all information can be found (but in various separate reports).															
HEWS Humanitarian Early Warning Service	IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) and WFP(WFP is responsible for coordination/management of content).	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	•	•	•	•	•	Maps on Website, specific tools/reports and links to organisations dealing with specific hazards. Various website tools related to hazards like locust infestation, flooding, weather, storms, etc. Seasonal and Hazards calendar : a retrospective tool marking FS related hazards in past year in a seasonal calendar.		

What information was provided and when on the Food Security situation of East Africa?

The EW/I-Systems on FS on East Africa are extensive. To some extent there is cross-fertilisation of information: Some EW/I-Systems use various of the same original sources from other systems to complete their own analyses. There is variety on to what level of accuracy alerts were given on the upcoming crisis. Annex 1 shows a detailed timeline of information related to the region of the key EW/I-Systems starting in July 2010 with the official announcement of 'La Niña'. The detailed information was evaluated in terms of accuracy (defined here as 'closeness to the actual crises situation as known mid June 2011') and timeliness.

Was this information sufficient, timely and accurate to predict an upcoming Food Security crisis?

On 10th of August 2010 FEWSNET provided the first warning on an upcoming deterioration in FS and that predicted the chance of a possibly worse than usual food insecurity. In its Special Report it cautioned that the first impacts could be felt in February 2011. In October and November 2010 FEWSNET predicted in its Food Assistance Outlook (projections for the following 6 months) an earlier than normal lean season and therefore assistance needs would be above average in Kenya and Somalia and would start earlier. Subsequently, the FSNWG announced in October 2010 to hold a meeting in November to discuss '*coordinated early response strategies based on these climatic predictions for the next 2 rainy seasons*'.

In November FEWSNET confirmed in its first FS Alert that '*The most severe food security outcomes, assuming additional assistance is not provided, would be expected in SE Kenya and Somalia, particularly after January/February 2011, when harvests normally occur*'. At the same time the FSNWG's Update called for alarm and action within the humanitarian community and recommended that response should start Jan/Feb to March/April 2011 (it made comparisons with a similar drought in Oct 2005-May 2006).

In Food Outlook as well as Crops Prospects and Food Situation from GIEWS no significant warnings were given in 2010, except for the statement in December 2010 that 'La Niña phenomenon/...../ may reverse recent improvements in food security'.

In December the IPC, through its biannual regional outlook map, indicated a humanitarian emergency for Central Somalia. The FSNWG added southern parts of Somalia to the area to be declared as humanitarian emergency. Djibouti is for the first time mentioned as potential area of risk. Only in 2011 concern was expressed on the FS situation in Ethiopia.

In February 2011, FEWSNET gave its second FS Alert '*Substantial assistance programs should be implemented to address current and expected food insecurity. In addition, large-scale contingency planning should begin immediately given that a failure of the March-May 2011 rains would result in a major crisis.*' It was particularly concerned on southern Somalia.

In March 2011 FEWSNET FS Alert warned that 'current assistance programs are inadequate to mitigate existing and expected food deficits and malnutrition.'

In March GIEWS mentioned a deterioration on FS but still did not refer to a 'crisis situation'. Throughout March and April FSNWG continued to call out for management of the food insecurity crisis on, especially, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia until the full extent of the crisis becomes clear in June 2011. Price Watch from FEWSNET rang alarm bells in April. By May most EW/I-Systems were clear on the severity.

It can be concluded that The FSNWG Alerts were overall very good to excellent in its accuracy and timeliness on this FS crisis. This field-driven coordination working group, established in Nairobi in 2005, is attended by staff from a wide group of organizations engaged in FS (NGOs, UN agencies, international humanitarian institutions, donors, governments, etc). It clearly fulfilled its main objectives on providing updated FS information and analysis as well as adequate alerts for upcoming crises in East Africa.

The initial FEWSNET Special Reports on the region were followed by FS Alerts. They demonstrated high accuracy in predicting a major food insecurity crisis in the geographical area concerned. Additionally, the timeliness of the first warnings were adequate, i.e. November 2010, with regular reconfirmations and with the call for assistance in February 2011 (*'an increase in the population in need of lifesaving emergency assistance between April and September 2011'*).

FEWSNET's Price Watch appeared to be a good tool for consulting *actual* information. It proved less useful for making predictions on developments leading to the FS crisis.

Surprisingly, there were no alerts or special reports provided by FAO's GIEWS on East Africa for the period August 2010 to June 2011. This is particularly worrying as it aims to *'For countries/areas facing food insecurity, the System ensures timely dissemination of special alerts and provides information on food requirements, pledges and deliveries of food aid.'*⁹

WFP has declared to have a core role in 'people-centred early warning systems'¹⁰, and has various products that are used for this:

- Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA)
- Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM)(WFP and FAO jointly)
- Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA)
- Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS)

None of these products were produced on the geographical area or on an individual country over the period 2010-2011, with one exception: 1 FSMS report came out on Ethiopia in April 2011.

Additionally, there was no Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) conducted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP to assess the food and non-food needs of refugees and other communities of concern to both organisations covering a part or the whole geographical area in 2010-2011.

Despite its name HEWS provided no early warning with regard to the drought in Somalia or elsewhere. HEWS seems merely a website service that provides links to information systems, rather than doing analysis. HEWS appears to be stronger on providing weather information than predicting humanitarian crises related to drought, food insecurity, famine, etc. Its Seasonal and Hazards Calendar is a retrospective calendar and

the January 2011 version lists no information on drought events in 2010 for either of the five concerned countries except for Djibouti. It has no actual predictive value, but it can be used as a generic planning tool for any given year.

Are there information gaps?

There are no information gaps.

Conclusions

The current EW/I-Systems were adequate enough to predict timely, at least 6 months ahead, the current FS crisis in the region. The EW/I-Systems also contained sufficient detailed as well as a wide variety of information which, all together, enabled the user to plan and respond timely with regard to the FS crisis. However, there was clearly a difference in quality among the various EW/I-Systems. FEWSNET's Special Reports and FS Alerts as well as FSNWG Updates have proven to be very good to excellent in predicting the severity and onset of the current FS crisis in East Africa.

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