

Famine in Southern Somalia: Questions & Answers

Q1: How is “famine” defined?

While there are various definitions of famine, many food security analysis agencies, including FSNAU and FEWS NET, use the definition reflected in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) version 1.1. According to the IPC, evidence of three specific outcomes is required for a famine to be declared: (1) at least 20% of households face extreme food shortages with limited ability to cope; (2) the prevalence of global acute malnutrition must exceed 30 percent and (3) crude death rates must exceed 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day.

Q2: Why is the current situation in Lower Shabelle and southern Bakool regions being classified as a ‘famine’?

The conditions in both Lower Shabelle and southern Bakool regions are classified as famine, based on evidence that food access, nutrition and mortality outcomes surpassing the three required famine thresholds. Other indicators of a very serious situation in these areas include large scale displacement and disease outbreaks.

Q3: How does this situation compare with current food security outcomes in other parts of the world?

This famine represents the most serious food insecurity situation in the world today in terms of both scale and severity.

Q4: How does this situation compare with previous famines?

Current mortality rates and levels of malnutrition are comparable to or exceed those reported during recent crises in Niger (2005), Ethiopia (2001), Sudan (1998), and Somalia (1992). Given the combination of severity and geographic scope this is the most severe food security crisis in Africa since the 1991/92 Somalia famine.

Q5: Is it possible that other areas in Somalia will experience famine conditions in the future?

Yes. As of July 2011 famine conditions exist only in two regions, but unless immediate large scale humanitarian interventions are carried out in Southern Somalia, all regions in Southern Somalia are likely to fall into a famine over the coming 1-2 months given current levels of mortality and malnutrition.

Q6: How many are in need and where?

It is estimated that the number of people in crisis is currently 3.7 million nationwide and 3.2 million of these people are in urgent need of lifesaving assistance, 2.8 million of whom are in the southern regions (63 percent of the 4.5 million residents in Southern regions).

Q7: Are Kenya and Ethiopia also in famine?

There is a severe regional food security crisis and populations in need of lifesaving assistance exist in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. However, famine is not predicted outside of southern Somalia.

Q8: Is there still time to intervene and what would be the most effective type of response to this crisis?

Current humanitarian response is inadequate to meet emergency needs, but tens of thousands of lives can still be saved with an immediate, massive, multisectoral, response.

Q9: What are the prospects for crops in Somalia over the coming 6 months?

It is estimated that crop production in the August *gu* harvest will be at best 50 percent of the five-year average, although major cereal harvests in the East Africa region are currently forecast to be near-normal.

Q10: What are the prospects for food prices in Somalia over the coming 6 months?

While imports of rice have increased significantly in the past months, trade restrictions still exist and local cereal prices are likely increase further through December 2011 due to reduce harvests. The price of imported red rice, which is still above the prices of other cereals, has stayed relatively stable over the past two years, which will probably impose a ceiling price on the prices of red sorghum and white maize.

Q11: What are the prospects for pasture in Somalia over the coming 6 months?

Pasture availability is already significantly below-average and is expected to deteriorate further, indicating that the coming dry season will be especially difficult for pastoral households.

Q12: How long will needs last?

Given that many households have already lost most if not all of their productive assets, it is very likely that needs for outside assistance will last well into next year, and perhaps even beyond. Immediate and long-term needs will be different during this period. Emergency life saving assistance is needed urgently, but rebuilding and restoring livelihoods will most probably take much longer.

Q13: How many deaths have occurred? How many will occur?

Estimates indicate that tens of thousands of excess deaths have occurred in the past three months. Additional excess mortality is very likely though specific estimates are not possible.

Q14: Did we have any warning of this crisis? When?

Yes. FEWS NET and FSNAU provided regular early warning information starting in August 2010.

Q15: What is happening in the central and northern regions?

These regions are also facing serious food insecurity, with nearly half a million people in these areas are in need of livelihood and life saving humanitarian assistance.

Q16: How does conflict affect food security?

Conflict can reduce both availability and access to food. Production may decline as a result of displacement, and civil insecurity and trade disruptions can interrupt food availability and access to basic services (e.g., education and health).

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