

## DROUGHT + POLITICS = FAMINE IN SOMALIA

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**ABSTRACT:** Disasters recognize no geographical boundary and cause disruption to human, social and ecological life of society. Every year natural disasters take a heavy toll on human lives and property. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) defines disaster as an overwhelming ecological disruption that exceeds the capacity of a community to adjust.

Besides natural disasters, present day mankind is also facing the brunt of man-made disasters like climate change, bioterrorism, industrial and technological disasters, ecological disasters, wild forest fire and so on. Whatever might be the nature or type of disasters, they cause irreparable losses and injuries to the mankind. Disasters are common occurrences all over the world.

Generally speaking the term disaster includes a natural or manmade disasters or a combination of both with its damaging affects in a large number which is large enough to disrupt the normal course of emergency and healthcare services.

Poor and developing countries are most vulnerable to these disasters. It is estimated that disaster losses in developing and third world countries are 20% higher than developed countries, as a percentage of GNP.

Out of many third world and developing countries, Somalia recently has faced a severe famine from 2011 to 2012. This famine was the worst disaster of the country's history. Both physical and human related factors contributed a lot to raise the severity of this famine. In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the causes (which are both natural and political), impacts of the famine. Moreover, some recommendations are also suggested.

**KEYWORDS:** Classic, Hazards, Degradation, Famine, Scarcity & Rehabilitation.

### INTRODUCTION

Droughts are the classic slow-onset disaster. They develop slowly, tend to last a long time and cover a wide geographic area. Unlike earthquakes or cyclones, where the date of hazard can be identified, droughts do not become disasters, until time has passed. Because they develop slowly, it is difficult to determine exactly when the drought begins and ends.

A drought is defined as "a period of abnormally dry weather, sufficiently prolonged for the lack of water to cause serious hydrologic imbalance in affected area."<sup>1</sup> But there is a lack of standard quantitative definition of drought –how far from normal pattern does have to decline in order for a shortfall in rainfall to be a drought? 10% below normal over 6 months in time?, 50% below normal over an year? In fact given the prevalence of and destruction caused by drought, it is surprisingly that there is not more clarity or statistical analyses of droughts. While other hazards have their own data bases (e.g. the

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<sup>1</sup> NOAA, "What is Meant by the Term Drought?"  
<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/Fgz/science/drought.php?Wfo=Fgz>

Dortmouth Flood Observatory collects data on floods; earthquakes are studied and monitored by the United States Geological Survey). There is no specific database on droughts.<sup>2</sup>

Droughts kill more people than any other type of disaster. Below et.al. reviewed drought disasters from 1900-2004, finding that more than half of 22 million deaths associated with natural hazards were due to drought. And yet droughts accounted for only 35% of the 5.4 billion people affected by natural disasters. In comparison, floods affected far more people accounting 50% of those affected by natural disasters. In other words droughts kill proportionally more people while floods affect a higher number of people than droughts. Surprisingly, they also found that only 7% of the estimated 1 \$1.2 trillion in economic losses from disasters occurring between 1900-2004 were due to droughts while floods, earthquakes and wind-storms each accounted for approximately 30%. It is so because droughts destroy crops and livelihoods, they rarely destroy or damage built structures or infrastructures.

"It is estimated that between five and six million hectares globally are permanently lost to agriculture each year through human induced soil degradation. Causes of land degradation include overgrazing, deforestation, agricultural, mismanagement, industry and urbanization. There is a high correlation between extreme poverty, land degradation and rural livelihoods.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To assess the humanitarian situation in Somalia and effects of the current drought.
2. To identify real needs of people affected by droughts.
3. To collect information for proposal development and fund raising.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper has used information obtained from various sources including articles from newspapers, magazines, internet and numerous books and research papers.

#### **AREA OF STUDY**

The country of Somalia is situated in Eastern Africa. It is also known as 'Horn of Africa'. Its climate is principally desert type in which rainfall is highly irregular. Reoccurring famines, deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, political instability, human health problems are major worries of this country. In present paper a detailed discussion will be made on drought conditions of the country who suffered nearly two lakh deaths due to droughts and problems associated with it.

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<sup>2</sup> Regina Below, Emily Grover – Kopec and Max Diley "Documenting Drought – Related Disasters : A Global Reassessment, "The Journal of Environment & Development, Vol. 16, No. 3, Sep. 2007, p. 332.



**CLASSIFICATION OF DROUGHTS**

As per meteorological department, a drought is a situation when annual average rainfall is less than 75% of the normal. A drought prone area is the one where at least 20% of years have recorded rainfall deficit. If this percentage exceeds 40% then the area is designated as chronically drought prone area (Indian Irrigation Commission, 1972). Drought can be classified into following types:

**(a) Meteorological Drought :**

It is a situation when annual rainfall over an area in a year is less than 75% of the normal. An area is termed as drought area if it experiences drought conditions in 20% of time whereas if the frequency is more than 40% in certain areas, it is termed as chronically drought prone. Most of Somalia, and it's neighboring countries are included in this category.

**(b) Hydrological Drought :**

Prolonged meteorological drought results in hydrological drought with a marked depletion in surface water and consequence drying up of reservoirs, lakes, streams and rivers, reduction of flows and fall in ground water level. Subrahmanyam and Subrahmanyam (1964) found that aridity index, viz., per cent ratio of annual water deficit to annual water need, proposed by Thornthwaite (1948) was most useful parameter to classify droughts in terms of standard deviation for normal aridity index. Later on, Shastri and Ramkrishna (1980) modified the explanations to classify droughts in arid regions (Table-1).

*Table 1. Classification of Droughts in Arid Region*

Intensity of Drought	Category of Droughts
0 or above	No Drought
0 to -0.53	Mild Drought
- 0.5 to – 1s	Moderate Drought
- 1s or below	Severe Drought

*s –signifies standard deviation*

*Sources: Ramakrishna, 1980.*

**(c) Agriculture Drought :**

It means that when the requirement (evapotranspiration) difference between water and water availability during the cropping season. As such the intensity of drought depends upon water stress which occurs during different stages of crop growth. The intensity of agriculture drought can be determined if water stress during growth period is evaluated on the basis of water requirement.

**(d) Ecological Drought :**

It occurs when the productivity of natural ecosystem fails substantially due to environmental damage caused by distress.

**(e) Socio-economic Drought :**

It occurs when production of food grains fails and situation of acute food shortage prevails in affected area.

**(f) Famine :**

Famine situation occurs when there is a large scale collapse of access to food, which results in mass starvation unless there is some external assistance. As such, there is a great stress and sufferings with large scale migration and dying of livestock.

**CAUSES OF FAMINE**

Famines are the result of "triple failure" :

**1. Production Failure :**

In Somalia, a two year drought which is phenomenal in now being the driest year in the last 60 has caused record food inflation, particularly in the expectation of the next harvest being 50% of the normal. Somalia already had levels of malnutrition and premature mortality so high as to be in a "normalized state of permanent emergency". This is true too in pockets of the entire region.

**2. Access Failure :**

The drought has killed off the pastoralists' prime livestock assets (upto 90% animal mortality in some areas) slashing further their purchasing power. In addition Somalia's severe internal conflict has made development almost impossible to achieve and data difficult to access both accurately and credibly.

**3. Response Failure :**

Underlying it all has been the inability of Somalia's government and donors to tackle the country's chronic poverty which has marginalized vulnerable people and fundamentally weakened their ability to cope. There has been a lack of investment in social services and basic infrastructure and lack of good governance. Meanwhile donors have reacted too late and too cautiously. The response of international community to this humanitarian crisis has been very slow and inadequate. According to UN figures, \$ 1 billion is required to meet immediate needs. So far, donors have committed less than \$ 200m, leaving an \$ 800 million black hole.

**4. Vagaries of Weather:**

Weather conditions over the Pacific Ocean, including an unusually strong La Nina, have interrupted seasonal rains for two consecutive seasons. The rains failed in 2011 and 2012 in Somalia. In many areas the precipitation rate during the main rainy season from April to June was less than 30% of average of 1995-2010. The lack of rain led to crop failure and widespread loss of livestock.

As a result, cereal prices rose to record levels while livestock prices and wages fell, reducing purchasing power across the region. The Crisis is further compounded by rebel activities around southern Somalia from Al-Shabab group.

**IMPACT OF DROUGHTS IN SOMALIA**

Its impact can be discussed under following headings:

**1. General Drought Situation in Somalia:**

Currently Somalia is experiencing the worst drought affecting both people and livestock in all parts of Somalia. The drought is hitting in all horn of African countries of Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. Somalia being the worst hit, north, central and southern regions situation is desperate. UNICEF has put the number of population that needs emergency livelihood and life saving assistance at 43 percent of population. Food security situation is worsening in all drought affected areas. The prices of food have risen up by 300 percent. Malnutrition in Children under five and adults has escalated. According to Oxfam International, about 25% of population to be actually malnourished in Gedo region.

**2. Water Situation:**

Water Scarcity is the first problem in entire affected areas. Almost all water points such as shallow wells, ponds and Birkas (an underground cistern) dried up because of long time lack of rains. There is high over utilization of the still working bore holes. A 200 liters of water costs \$10 in Togdher region which is one of the worst hit region. Under these circumstances people are forced to drink dirty and stinking water remained at the bottom of the dried up wells. This has resulted in outbreak of water born diseases in many parts of the region. Water-trucking, construction and rehabilitation of boreholes, rehabilitation and de-silting of dams are the first intervention priority.

**3. Pasture Condition:**

It is quality and availability has been decreased severely in all affected areas. Water and pasture distance has increased significantly since major water points at posture areas have dried up.

**4. Livestock Body and Health Condition:**

The physical livestock condition in the country is very weak. It is very common to see left out cows after they could not move. In addition to lack of pasture and water, there are diseases like anthrax, black leg and pastreulosis which are killing animal.

**5. Human Health Condition:**

High malnutrition, diarrhea, dysentery and other water borne diseases are common in many parts of the country. There is an urgent need to increase the supply of medicines, therapeutic feeding, rehydration fluids, water purification chemicals for affected people to avert epidemics are urgently needed.

**6. Food Security Status:**

It is very below normal Food prices have risen by 300% and there is no market for livestock for example in normal times one goat was equivalent to 50 kg of wheat or maize but now five goats can't buy 50kg of wheat or maize. Failure of crops for two consecutive seasons i.e. 2011 and 2012 and pirates in the coasts of Somalia are responsible to the increase of food prices. In addition to the drought diseases in many parts of the country contributed in low demand of livestock in the markets in the country.

**7. Copping strategies of people:**

As the magnitude of this drought is very large, options left to the people is limited. Moving to cities for begging and seeking casual labor, selling properties, selling firewood and water in the cities are the coping strategies that people are using. This severe drought has forced the people of rural areas to left their birth places and move towards cities for their survival. For example in the South many people went to the capital Mogadishu where they prefer to live under the fight and bombardment over starving in their localities. There is daily fighting between government troops and the Al-Shabab militia which controls the whole southern region and most of the capital.

**8. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps in Togdher**

Togdher is one of the 12 regions of Somaliland. This region borders with Puntland in South, Ethiopia in West and Berbera and Hargeisa on the east and north respectively. Burao is the seat of the region and one of the biggest livestock market of the East Africa with a total population of 217689 . The life in these camps is very difficult, no shelter, no food, no health or education services. There is still shortage of food. Generally women and children go to Burao town for begging, seeking daily labor. Men also seek casual labor in town. Availability of water is poor in camps. The nearest source of water is Burao, an hour to go and an hour to come back. No health services at all, incidents of diarrhea is common from all camps. Malnutrition is high in children and elderly people. Post natal death is also very high in the camps. Unlike other camps, Aden Suleiman has primary health care centre where UNICEF provides medicines irregularly. Near the camp there is functional boreholes constructed by Somalian government.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The effect of drought is very huge and deep. It is the natural result of long time rain failure in an arid and Semi-arid are where rains are scarce and less intense. Gaps created by drought is very big and cannot be covered the community unless the external support is combined with local efforts. Following are some recommendations:

**1. For Water:**

There is a gap between water availability. Currently, the price of water is escalating. Rehabilitation of malfunctioning boreholes is another problem. To reduce the number of displacement of lack of water and to relief burdens on functioning boreholes, water trucking is urgently needed particularly in the areas where water points exhausted. Rehabilitation of malfunctioning boreholes is also repeatedly requested. To solve water shortage in the long run, construction of more boreholes, dams, wells and birkas should be considered.

**2. For Livestock:**

More than 55% of population in Somalia is nomads depending upon livestock for their livelihood and are most hit by this current drought. Normally the outbreaks of livestock diseases are very common during droughts because of hunger, long distance journeys in search of water and fodder. To save the life of these livestock emergency treatment and vaccination campaigns should be conducted.

**3. Emergency Food Distribution:**

There is a big short fall in food in all affected areas. Due to no harvest over last few years the prices of food are skyrocketing. Emergency food distribution and therapeutic feeding is needed to save life and minimize malnutrition.

**4. Human Health:**

Health services are very poor. Drought affected people do not have enough access as well as purchasing power to purchase medicines even from government agencies. Hence emergency health interventions in most affected areas and IDP camps should be considered.

**CONCLUSION**

Although droughts occur elsewhere with devastating effects, it is particularly prevalent in Africa. Drought unlike floods or cyclones, generally has a long lead time. The famine that struck the Somalia has resulted in deaths of tens of thousands of people and animals.

The 2011 to 2012 famine in Somalia was not only a natural phenomenon but also a product of human made factors, including lack of governance, political instability and conflict, which undermined traditional coping strategies that have evolved over generations in response to the natural hazard of drought.<sup>3</sup> As Amartya Sen pointed out decades ago, famines do not occur in democracies.<sup>4</sup> The best way of preventing famines is not simply a technical issue of coming up with better warning systems or food delivery mechanisms, but engaging in for more difficult task of creating political systems capable of protecting and assisting their people when natural hazards occur.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Corbett, "Famine and Household Coping Strategies", *World Development*, Vol. 16, No. 9, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999.

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