

ECOSOC

Catastrophic Hunger Levels in Somalia

Topic Background:

Somalia faces catastrophic hunger, with the country devastated by the extreme and worsening drought in the Horn of Africa. It leaves 500,000 children at the risk of losing their lives.¹

A total of 7.1 million people face acute food insecurity amid the driest conditions in 40 years, following three consecutive failed rainy seasons. Drought is compounding the impacts of other recurrent climate shocks, persistent insecurity and instability. A total of 1.5 million children under 5 face acute malnutrition; 386,000 of these face severe malnutrition and may be at risk of dying without immediate treatment. More than a million people have been displaced by the drought, 750,000 of whom this year only.²

Famine could break out in a matter of weeks in some regions if livestock and crops continue to die and soaring prices continue to destroy purchasing power. The last famine declared in Somalia, in 2011, killed a quarter of a million people.³

¹ Catastrophic hunger levels leave 500,000 children at risk of dying in Somalia.

² Somalia: Hunger crisis 2021-2022.

³ Ibid

In the face of this crisis, WFP is working to scale up its emergency food and nutrition response to reach a total of 4.5 million people a month – but needs US\$327 million until January 2023 to continue saving lives.⁴ The gap between hunger and the humanitarian response is widening. Immediate action is needed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

General History:

There have been a variety of food systems over time. For a large portion of history, humans hunted or grew food for their own consumption, and food traveled only short distances from source to stomach.⁵ This does not mean, however, that long distance food exchanges were not present. From spice trades to acquiring “exotic” foods from colonies, a “mercantile food system” was present from 1500-1750. This was replaced by the “settler-colonial” regime during the nineteenth century in which white settler colonies traded luxury and basic foods and goods in return for European manufactured goods.⁶ The “productivist” food regime emerged after World War II which was characterized by food industries and the re-emergence of European and American agricultural protectionism. The idea that the entire world can experience a “food crisis” was coupled with the idea that one can foment a world free from hunger.

A neoliberal food regime has developed since the 1980s. Characterized by multinational and corporate power, this system has promoted a “global diet” that is high in sugars and fats at the expense of traditional or local diets. This trend in food

⁴ A global food crisis | World Food Programme.

⁵ Feast and Famine: The Global Food Crisis.

⁶ Ibid

is caused in part by globalization, and creates an intricate relationship between the individual and multinational corporations, local and distant farms and the environment.

Chronic hunger and food security are inherently connected. Citizens of the most industrial places on the planet still experience hunger on a massive scale. According to the vice president of the Poverty and Prosperity Program of the Center for American Progress: “people making trade-offs between food that’s filling but not nutritious...(this) may actually contribute to obesity.”⁷ Regarding larger scale suffering, extreme causes of world hunger include poverty, powerlessness, armed conflict, environmental overload and discrimination.

While hunger is understood differently across time, space and culture, it is important to alleviate this problem of chronic hunger. One must investigate sustainable solutions to the root causes of the problem, and these long-term solutions should be implemented by local peoples.⁸

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

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