

DROUGHT 2011: HOW KENYA RESPONDED

Background Document and Overview / Kenya / March 2012

INTRODUCTION

The Kenya Red Cross Society operational response to the 2011 drought has been documented in their operational updates in July, August, September and November and will be assessed in detail next month for the mid-term evaluation. The following serves as a backgrounder and overview of their response during 2011.

The challenges that the Kenya Red Cross faced in 2011, including a drought, floods, landslides and accidents, were tackled with new partnerships and innovative solutions. Kenyans responded through a volunteer network of 70,000 people and a nationwide fundraising campaign, known as the Kenyans for Kenya initiative. KRCS fostered an increasing number of private sector partnerships, and is implementing more market-based approaches in attempt to tackle the underlying causes of poverty. The Kenyans for Kenya initiative mobilized over five million dollars in less than three weeks, with the majority of Kenyans donating through their unique mobile money transfer system, M-Pesa. The money raised and emergency relief effort provided frontline life-saving assistance but will not alone address the root causes of the crisis.

KRCS volunteers and branch staff across the country are working now to build the resilience of people living in drought-affected areas to adapt to the rapid climatic, demographic, and socio economic changes occurring across the country. Humanitarian assistance is departing from symptomatic 'traditional' relief to long-term measures that will reduce dependence on food aid. An increasing number of sustainable solutions are emerging around the country where former pastoralists are cultivating crops and selling off surplus.

CONTEXT

The effects of climate change have become more visible across the Horn of Africa through alternating cycles of drought (associated with *La Nina*) and floods (associated with *El-Nino*). In Kenya, droughts in 2004, 2006, and 2009 with floods in between, have not destroyed the livelihoods and resilience of people living in the drylands, but severely undermined their ability to cope with reoccurring disasters. Those who depend on water and pasture to sustain their livelihoods, mainly pastoralists, are the worst affected. In the past, pastoralists have lived through peaks and troughs of

rainfall by reducing livestock to sustainable numbers and migrating across the arid lands find water and pasture. However, demographic changes, politics, international borders and war have disrupted these traditional methods of survival. An [IFRC opinion piece](#) written in July 2011 explores the root cause of recurrent droughts in more detail.

Increasing privatization of land and tourism has meant that less land is available for grazing and harvesting. Alongside the increasing frequency, intensity and impact of drought, Kenya's arid and semi arid lands have become highly vulnerable to any mild fluctuations in rainfall. The short and long rains are critical following dry seasons to replenish the country's parched land and restock water sources. These rains are becoming more unpredictable. In 2010 and 2011, they were too brief and depressed to improve the fragile and deteriorating state of the drylands.

From late 2010 onwards, Kenya's arid lands slowly evolved into the scene of a humanitarian crisis, or what became known in July 2011 as the 'Horn of Africa Drought Crisis' - a label which did not adequately reflect the complex, multifaceted and slow-onset nature of disaster. Kenya's 'crisis' was not a sudden onset emergency but the pinnacle of a decade of recurrent droughts that have become more pronounced, with effects more devastating, without time in between for communities to recover.

Insufficient collective action by government and their development partners to focus on early action, mitigation, and building the long-term resilience of people living in drought-affected areas, over short-term symptomatic relief, has enabled this increasingly deteriorating situation to occur. Cyclic food aid distributions have encouraged people to remain in areas that have become inhospitable. Inappropriate interventions have inhibited traditional drought coping mechanisms, such as urban migration, from occurring, as argued in an [IFRC opinion piece](#) written last August.

HOW KENYA'S CRISIS UNFOLDED

In July 2010, the Kenya Meteorological Department issued a *La Nina* forecast, warning that large areas would experience drier than normal conditions and an early cessation of short rains. The situation was predicted to unfold into a serious drought. Four months later, in November 2010, the regional, multi-sectoral, inter-agency platform, the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) disseminated an alert to over 700 key stakeholders, including donors and international organisations, advocating for pre-emptive actions to support livelihoods. This alert was followed by dozens of other advocacy messages, echoing alerts from key early warning systems such as

FEWSNET and analysis from FSNAU. Relatively little attention or action from the international community followed.

Following depressed rainfall from October to December 2010, reports started to come in from Kenya Red Cross branches of livestock deaths, acute food shortages, increasing pastoralist migration due to depleting pasture and water resources and high school drop out rates. The areas dependent on the short rains were expected to experience unfavorable crop production and deteriorating livestock conditions. The Kenya Red Cross Society rapid assessment reports showed that drought was indeed evolving in 18 counties of Kenya's six provinces:

1. Upper Eastern (Marsabit, Moyale, Isiolo, Samburu and Tharaka)
2. North Rift (Turkana and West Pokot)
3. North Eastern (Garrisa, Wajir and Mandera)
4. Coast Region (Kwale, Lamu, Malindi, Kilifi and Tana River)
5. Lower Eastern (Kitui South and Kajiado)
6. South Rift (Baringo, Mogotio and Narok)

In January 2011, the severity did not yet warrant an emergency classification, but the extreme hardship that had been reported from the above areas and predicted deterioration led the KRCS to appeal for early action.

EARLY ACTION

What is known in the international humanitarian community as 'early action' was for KRCS, a scaling up and diversification of ongoing activity across the country. Following reports that seasonal conflicts over water resources had began earlier than usual and a significant decline in school enrolment, KRCS launched a national drought appeal on January 14th 2011, seeking CHF 28, 343, 156 (USD 24, 906, 112) in cash, kind or services to support 1,860,000 people for six months. Early action was critical to mitigate potentially disastrous consequences, such as mounting levels of conflict as a result of competition over dwindling pasture and water, and increasing numbers of school dropouts as male pupils leave school to become migrant herders.

The experience of the KRCS of working in the country has shown that the only solution to recurring droughts is through empowering communities through responsible, sustainable, long-term interventions, over provision of relief aid. Due to the severity of the 2011 drought, life-saving

'symptomatic' relief (water trucking, food distribution and school feeding) was crucial to mitigate the consequences outlined above, but KRCS planned to begin as soon as possible their 'early warning, early action' initiatives which are aimed at protecting livelihoods, building on coping mechanisms and increasing community resilience to drought.

Over the next six months, the humanitarian situation deteriorated across the country with relatively limited international attention or assistance. The 'long rains' from March through to May were depressed resulting in a second successive poor season in many parts of the rangelands and lowlands. The worst hit areas were Wajir, Marsabit, Isiolo, northern Garissa, northern Tana River, and Mandera, as well as the southeastern marginal districts of Kitui, Makueni, Mwingi, and Tharaka. The area output of crop production declined significantly in most districts. Some areas produced roughly 40-50 percent of the five-year average. Watering distances extended. In parts of Lower Eastern, they were at 10-15km where they are normally 1-3km. Many of the remaining surface water sources were expected to deplete even further. According to further KRCS assessments, pasture continued to deteriorate, water scarcity was leading to exceptionally long migrations, and there was a resurgence of conflict.

Predicting this deterioration, KRCS launched their emergency appeal on the 23 March 2011 for CHF 4,931,743 for 6 months to assist 855,000 beneficiaries (later revised to CHF 7,529,019).

In May 2011, The Kenya Food Security Steering group mid season assessment reported that 3.2 million people were in need urgent cross-sectoral interventions, up from 2.4 million in March. On May 30th 2011, the Government declared the ongoing drought a national disaster. By June, malnutrition rates reached emergency levels and the situation began to attract media attention. On July 20, The UN declared famine in Somalia, attracting the world's media a large number of new humanitarian actors, especially from the Arab and Gulf States.

THE RESPONSE

For all the challenges that 2011 brought, it was the year that Kenyans from all corners of the country transcended tribal, social, cultural and economic boundaries to contribute to the relief effort through the Kenyans for Kenya initiative and volunteer action.

Throughout 2011, KRCS responded with a 'twin track approach': attempting to meet immediate humanitarian needs, whilst continuing to implement long term interventions aimed at rebuilding the

communities' resilience to future disasters. Following the January drought appeal, KRCS scaled up services including water trucking, food assistance, provision of drought tolerant seeds, supplementary feeding, and emergency livestock interventions.

Kenyans for Kenya

On July 23rd, a Nairobi-based Kenyan media consultant, Ahmed Salim, posted on twitter to encourage people to donate to the Kenya Red Cross with the trending tag #FeedKE. In one day, over 59 people donated. As #FeedKe started to trend and the donations began coming in, Ahmed contacted KRCS asking them to set up a financial platform to absorb the donations.



Yes these are our people!! #FeedKE - <http://bit.ly/oSIMCo>

A few weeks later, KRCS saw the potential the campaign and partnered with mobile network provider Safaricom, mobile money transfer system M-Pesa, and the Kenyan bank KCB, to launch the Kenyans for Kenya initiative. Following several social media campaigns and fundraisers, Kenyans for Kenya brought in Ksh 677,716,662 (8,165,260,99 USD) by their last audit in October.

KRCS is successfully engaging with the exploding use of communication technology, social media, growing private sector and social enterprise across the country. With over 20 million Kenyans using mobile phones, twitter and Facebook, KRCS is taking advantage of these networks to receive and send timely information and to improve the way they respond to disasters across the country. In addition the toll-free emergency hotline, twitter and Facebook feeds are monitored 24 hours a day and KRCS are now often alerted to incidents before the police or fire services. After a pipeline burst

in downtown Nairobi, KRCS use twitter to direct people to emergency shelters and provide real time information to affected communities. If a fire starts or a bus crashes, someone can take a photo and send it through twitter to KRCS HQ to dispatch volunteers and assistance.

The network of 70,000 Kenya Red Cross Society volunteers across the country is crucial to conduct relevant work to empower communities. For humanitarian or emergency response to work or have a lasting impact, it is essential to have people responding from the community alongside technical experts. It means that any interventions will be relevant, sustainable and essential, what the community wants.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Several reports and evaluations have been published on the overall humanitarian response during the 2011 drought crisis. Development Agencies, donors and governments have been criticised for not responding quickly enough to early warnings, not fully understanding and engaging with the socio-economic developments in the dry lands, responding with dated and inappropriate programming, and exacerbating food aid dependence in the region.

According to a Save the Children/Oxfam report published in January 2011, the drought response was too little, too late, representing a systematic failure of the international humanitarian and development system. Echoing the IFRC Opinion piece '*Early Warning, Delayed Response?*' published 6 months earlier, which advocated for investment in community resilience even when the weather conditions look good, to provide long-term solutions to recurring droughts. The FSNWG paper similarly concludes that despite sophisticated early warning systems to help predict and, in theory, prevent the escalation of severe food crises, it did not result in pre-emptive actions and early response at scale. Subsequently, the Horn of Africa was left to face one of the most serious food crises in recent memory, in terms of scale and severity. During the response, a real time evaluation by the Disaster Emergency Committee showed that there was a lack of transparent coordination and decision-making that contributed to turf wars between agencies, a lack of clarity around partnerships, future intentions and program duration.

The majority of the drought response analysis stresses an urgent need to provide long-term livelihood security for pastoralists to break the cycle of drought emergencies and prevent unnecessary and expensive emergency relief efforts in the future. Improving long-term livelihoods across the Horn requires innovate and flexible interventions to be implemented along with

addressing underlying structural problems. Poor infrastructure, alongside poor access to markets and finance are hindering progress. Although humanitarian agencies have improved their understanding of markets and market interventions in recent years, the impact of escalating food prices had yet to be adequately accounted for in the design of relief responses, particularly those involving food and cash inputs.

The Inter Agency Working Group, co-chaired by the IFRC East Africa Regional Representation, held an event in Nairobi on the 1st of March this year, to bring together all the major international stakeholders in the region, review the critical analysis above and develop concrete steps to change the way drought emergencies are responded to. Participants have pledged to focus on supporting interventions, which improve long-term livelihoods of pastoralists and develop innovative means of adaptation. Secondly, to encourage grassroots innovation and community-led drought risk management and development. Thirdly, to engage with the private sector, local institutions and civil society to enhance the local economy in a sustained way. Partnerships with emerging actors including Kenyans 4 Kenya, Northern Aid, the Somali diaspora, Hyogo Framework for Action DRR Platforms is essential to widespread and achieve any lasting impact.

KRCS is working now to build the resilience and encourage climate change adaptation at grassroots levels. Efforts are focusing on empowering people to identify their own development priorities expanding smallholder farming.



Localfarmers in flourishing cassava plantations, where rain and maize crops have failed

HOPE IN A HARSH CLIMATE: ADAPTING TO THE FUTURE

Case Study / Kenya / March 2012

Driving out of Nairobi at 6,000 feet, the air becomes hotter, the roads dustier and the land drier. Last year, early March marked the beginning long rains season but now it still feels like the peak of the dry season.

“It should be raining here by now but you can’t predict or depend on these things anymore” explains Joe Mbalu, as he welcomes us to the Machakos branch of the Kenya Red Cross Society.

Driving out of the bustling Machakos town through the surrounding hills, it is difficult to understand how the district has such high levels of destitution or poverty (64%). But as we get deeper into drier marginal agricultural land, we start to drive through failed maize crops, and over dried up rivers. The land appears increasingly unsuitable for farming and water stocks too low to sustain livestock.



Following successive seasons of chronic food insecurity, maize crop failure, and relief dependence, KRCS is working with local farmers and the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute to experiment

with drought resistant crops.

Dried up rivers in Machakos

“The British introduced maize farming in the 1950s when the weather was different. The idea that maize represents civilization is still alive amongst the farming community and it has been a challenge to encourage farmers to change the way they have worked for 50 years, but now essential to adapt...”



Dwindling Maize Stocks (Right)

In the semi-arid landscape, we arrive at the local farmers association, Yatta Farm Growers and Process CBO, who proudly show us their flourishing crop of cassava in the midday heat.



Yatta Farmers From l-r: David Muoka, Mashesh Sami Ngudu, Titus Kaluli, Daniel Kiswily, Edward Mutie

Cassava is a diverse crop and a staple food, able to cope with erratic rainfall, it can be stored in the ground, milled into flour, or sold on for different uses. It can help farmers move beyond subsistence farming to generating sustainable incomes. The Yatta farmers have built a *Jua Kali* (DIY)



factory (right) to make cassava flour from the harvest and sell on to buyers who have approached the KRCS.

In Machakos, KRCS is working to empower communities to decide on their own development priorities.

“We have big plans to slowly build a cassava factory, to try and industrialize the village. This is our main wish...god willing ” explains David Muoka (*right*) as he enthusiastically shows us around his factory-in-progress.

Smallholder farmers and pastoralists should be supported by similar investments in



innovative natural resource management, flexible and adequate financial schemes, technical support and introduction to new crop varieties and livestock breeds.

As we leave the factory to visit one more farm, a farmer tells me that for as long as he remembers, the area has been under relief programmes. He hopes that steps such as these can encourage his district and the rest of the country to be food



“We don’t want to be dependent on food aid... we want to dig for our children and our futures, to determine our own futures” – David Muoka, Yatta Group



secure.

As we drive back to the town, we are shown a rare sight, a small reservoir of water by the side of the road, where sand has been laid to retain water after the rainy season: "As you can see the water has almost gone, but hopefully it will fill up again soon"



Back at the Machakos branch Joe and Kris Schroeder, a volunteer from the Australian Red Cross, show us their new pizza oven. They have planned

to buy cassava flour from the farmers and use it to make pizza to be sold on in a pizza restaurant at the branch.



"We can make pizza, invite people to taste it, buy it and run education trainings all at the same time... eventually we hope to set up a pizza delivery service in the town to begin income generating activities"

KRCS is developing income-generating activities in branch societies to become more financially sustainable.

READING LIST FOR REFERENCE

Throughout 2011, IFRC published a number of opinion pieces on the causes and appropriate intervention to droughts in the Horn of Africa

- June 2011: [Early Warning, Delayed Response](#) by Alasan Senghore, Director of the Africa Zone
- July 2011: [Politics, War, Migration: The anatomy of a humanitarian crisis](#) & [A letter from Turkana](#) by Alexander Matheou, East Africa Regional Representative
- August 2011: [Don't Blame it on the rain](#) by Steve McDowell, Regional Advisor on Food Security
- November 2011: [The Horn of Africa deserves our commitment even when the Drought has passed](#) by Alexander Matheou

Contact Information

Alexander Matheou, *Regional Representative for East Africa*

alexander.matheou@ifrc.org / + 254 20 2835124

Nelly Muluka *Communications Manager, Kenya Red Cross Society*

muluka.nelly@kenyaredcross.org / + 254 722 371426