

Drought in Kenya

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Countries located in areas with yearly low rainfall are always fighting drought. Drought is a period of abnormally low rainfall, especially one that adversely affects growing or living conditions. Sometimes, if the environment lacks rain for a long time, it can be devastating for the living population. Because of the climate change in Africa, many countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya (The Horn of Africa) are constantly fighting drought. The most outrageous case recently reported is the one Kenya is facing. Located in East Africa, Kenya since 2010 is experiencing its worst drought ever. The outcome of this insufficient rain is malnutrition and the spread of diseases. Those individuals most affected by these situations in Kenya are women and children. Because of its lack of resources as a third world country, Kenya is calling for the whole world to come together and help them overcome the increasing drought that is taking place since January 2011.

Insufficient rains in Africa have created drought conditions destroying crops and killing livestock, which is making families travel long distances in search of food. Because of the high temperatures, not all foods are available to the population. Also, high prices of food make it unaffordable for much of the population; Kenyans are forced to feed themselves with anything they can find, even spoiled food and water, for survival ("Horn of Africa Famine", 2011). Then they develop malnutrition. Malnutrition means that an individual's body does not receive the vitamins, minerals and other nutrients it needs to stay healthy and allow organs to function properly. In Kenya the specific problems tend to be a lack of protein for energy, and a deficiency in vitamin A and iodine. These deficiencies have three severe consequences: child mortality, intelligence loss, and reduced productivity. First, child mortality is often due to the lack of protein and irregular breastfeeding practices; statistics show that 24% of infant deaths is

due to poor breastfeeding practices. Second, intelligence loss is a problem related to malnutrition that is not to be ignored. Proper nutrition is important to the complete development (physical development, mental development and school performance) of a child. Moreover, evidence shows that malnourished children have low IQs. On a scale of 100, the IQs of children with malnutrition are 13 points lower than children who are receiving appropriate vitamins, minerals and nutrients. The third consequence of malnutrition is low productivity. Low productivity is due to the deficiency of iodine in pregnant Kenyan women. "Iodine is necessary for the normal development of the brain of the fetus during pregnancy" ("Malnutrition Causes and Signs," n.d.) Malnutrition is an extremely serious consequence of the current famine.

Besides dealing with malnutrition, Kenyans have to face and fight several diseases. Because of its long history of food crises, the UN has attributed the famine to drought. According to Dr. Samson Agbo, Merlin's Head of Health, "The amount and availability of food in the Horn of Africa has gone from bad to worse compared to 2010. The malnutrition rates are horrendous and we know that many children will die from starvation" ("Update on Merlin's East Africa Emergency Response," 2011). Many cases of night blindness, kwashiorkor and goiter have been reported. Night blindness is a disease that is caused by vitamin A deficiency. It destroys the cornea and may result in permanent irreversible blindness. Goiter is a disease that comes from the deficiency of iodine in the nutrition. Another serious disease is kwashiorkor: "Kwashiorkor is a condition that results from inadequate protein intake. Early symptoms include fatigue, irritability, and lethargy. As protein deprivation continues, one sees growth failure, loss of muscle mass, generalized swelling (edema), and decreased

immunity” (“Kwashiorkor Symptoms,” 2010). All these diseases are a direct result of malnutrition.

Since January 2011, Kenya has been addressing the situation to avoid the increase in deaths of women and children. Today, different organizations are coming together to help Kenya in its drought crisis. In August, 2011, the Kenyan government has spent ten billion shillings to combat drought in the country. The government has decided that it needs to speed the delivery of food that goes to starving people. Also, Kenya’s cabinet sent military to help in the delivery. Despite these efforts put by the Kenya’s government, it is not moving fast enough because of the lack of resources (Peter, 2011). In search for ways to better prepare for upcoming drought, Kenya is requesting help from the UN, the USA and other health organizations. It wishes to have a system that will allow them to predict severe drought in the future. In an attempt to better fight drought in Kenya, women have suggested that they start feeding their family with camel milk: “Camels produce milk all year round and produce when other livestock stop or die from dehydration,” explains Phillippa Young from the What Took You So Long Foundation (qtd. in Whiter, 2011).

To help Kenya make it through the drought crisis, a U.S. government team arrived in Kenya on August 8, 2011. U. S. Vice President Joe Biden and his wife visited the Dadaab Refugee Camp to acknowledge the present situation. According to the White House, Biden’s trip was meant to show the commitment of the U.S. to Horn of African drought victims. In the process of helping Kenyans, Vice President Biden was scheduled to meet with the Kenyan’s president and prime minister to discuss ways to respond to the crisis (“US Team in Kenya to

Assess and Address Drought,” 2011). To be effective, many criteria should be considered by organizations. Solutions should be the result of collaboration between the Kenyan government, the organizations (UN, Merlin and others), and the local communities. First, it is important to focus on the population (women and children) that is the most at risk. Second, children should be monitored from ages 0-24 months and should be monitored during pregnancy and lactation. “Third, the government should emphasis on the prevention, which means that nutrition information, education communication need to be emphasized. Fourth, the government should focus on community ownership to ensure community participation and involvement for achieving sustainability” (“Recommendation for Kenya,” n.d). Finally, funds received by humanitarian organizations should be spent on developing a system that will allow Kenyans to predict seasons of drought (“Recommendation for Kenya,” n.d). It is important to find solutions and learn for the future.

Drought in East Africa has been continuous for some time, leading to serious consequences. Kenya is the country most affected by drought in 2011. Drought seems to be increasing over the years. Several diseases due to malnutrition form lack of food are killing thousands of people (especially women and children) in Kenya. Attempts are being made to help Kenya acquire necessary resources for their survival. In the process of fighting the drought crisis, several organizations are providing funds to Kenya, and other countries are meeting with Kenyan authorities to help resolve the issue. Because of the physical location and climate situation of Kenya, fighting drought must be its primary concern.

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