



## **FAMINE DISASTER IN NORTHERN KENYA: ACORD'S PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS AND APPEAL FOR COMMON RESPONSE**

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### **I. Introduction**

This note is an information paper prepared by ACORD on Northern Kenya's unprecedented drought and emergency situation that unfortunately is not only affecting Kenya but also the entire belt of East, South and the Horn of Africa; all areas where ACORD is present.

ACORD would like to take advantage of its experience in working in marginalised, remote and drought prone areas to mobilise and coalesce efforts of its Members and other supportive donors to intervene. It is to be recalled that ACORD was born out of its members' response to similar emergencies in the Sahel and the Sudan during the 1970s. ACORD has transformed and now not only addresses practical needs of the people, but also combines that with advocacy on policy issues that address the underlying factors of poverty and marginalisation. This puts us in good stead to respond to this situation as we appreciate that such disasters have other underlying causes other than the obviously ecological ones.

ACORD is convinced the alarming situation in Northern Kenya is a living case that demonstrates how 'free trade' that is claimed to be a panacea for development is failing to appreciate the intricacies of the social, political, historical and ecological environment in which Africa's poor live. The Northern Kenya situation might be seen not merely as a natural disaster but also a reflection of the collapse of small scale and household farming in Africa.

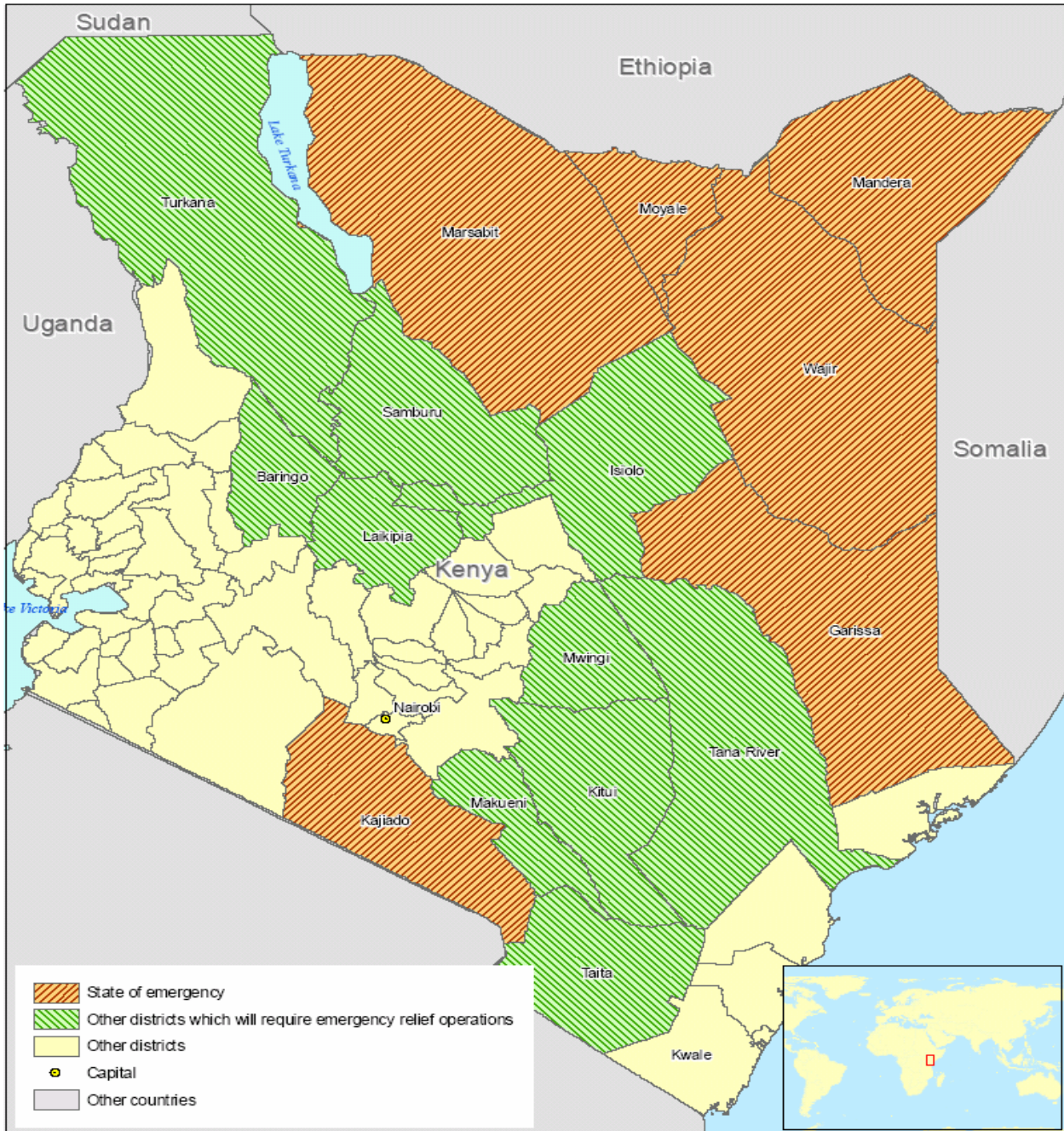
***This note is therefore an 'appeal for a common response' not only for emergency but as an opportunity to engage together more strategically on the issues underlying the disaster.***

### **II. Background**

Kenya is facing a disaster of immense proportions affecting a population close to 2.5 million as of December 2005, a figure that has since been revised upwards to 4.5 million people. This is due to unprecedented drought that has wiped out between 30% (in less

severe areas) and 70% of livestock in the mostly Arid and semi arid lands (ASAL)<sup>1</sup>. The affected area stretches from the North-western border with Uganda and Southern Sudan to the North-east horn neighbouring Ethiopia and Somalia down to the plains in Eastern and Rift valley provinces inhabited by among others the world renowned Maasai pastoralists-see map below. The President of Kenya has since declared this drought a national disaster and appealed for emergency assistance.

### Map of Kenya Showing Districts in Need of Emergency Relief



<sup>1</sup> (Meeting briefs between ACORD and Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Special programmes in the Office of the President, 17/01/2006)

The Kenyan government is trying to mitigate the drought's impact on livestock by buying cattle from pastoralists. The weak ones are slaughtered to provide meat to the people while the much stronger ones are stocked by government through the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) as core future breeding stock for the pastoralists. However very little funds have been allocated for this exercise, not to mention that it also started late when most livestock had been lost due to the drought. Pastoralists also hesitate to exchange their cattle for money and tend to wait until the cattle are too weak.

It is worth noting that over 90% of the 200,000 primary and secondary school going children in the affected areas have not reported back to school despite the opening of schools in early January this year. This is primarily due to lack of school fees as their parents have no livelihood to support their families let alone afford school fees.

Although the government has directed that school administrations allow students back in class without school fees, the respective administrations have no way of running the institutions without money and so many schools are still closed two weeks into the first semester of the academic year. This has the potential of reversing the gains made in the education sector. But deeper analysis shows that free education may not be the issue since even primary education which is free has suffered a great deal as pupils migrate with their parents in search of food and water for themselves and their livestock. Girls are disproportionately affected since culturally, they are expected to help their mothers look for water and attend to other domestic chores. In addition, scarcity of water presents a big challenge for girls in their puberty experiencing menses as sanitation is key to their reproductive health during that period. Most girls have therefore been forced to drop out of school.

All water streams and wells have dried up leading to a very severe shortage. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) estimated that 12.7 million dollars would be needed urgently to provide for water alone for livestock and people in the worst affected area of North Eastern province of Kenya.

The Kenya government has estimated that it will cost 28 billion Kenya shillings (USD 373million) to effectively deal with the situation<sup>2</sup>, yet only 8 billion shillings, or USD 107 million, has so far been mobilised.

As of August 2005, the government estimated that 20% of the children in Turkana, Mandera and Wajir districts were malnourished with higher but unestablished percentage expected in the districts of Garissa, Marsabit, Isiolo and Tana River. Today, the situation is worse with over 37 districts reporting severe malnutrition among children.

## **The Development Contradictions in Kenya**

The drought disaster stands in stark contrast with what economists have called booming economic growth in Kenya with 5% GDP growth last year, the highest in over one and a half decades. By 2008 the economy is projected to grow to 7-8% annually. Statistics available for 2004 indicate that the Manufacturing Industry hit 4.1% growth, Construction

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Special Programmes, Office of the President

industry 3.5%, Wholesale, Retail Trade and Repairs 9.5%, Tourism and Hotels 15.1% and Transport and Communication 9.7%. The total export earnings rose significantly in 2004 as a result of improved international commodity prices. The export volume recorded a 17.3% growth while the total value of imports grew by 29.6%<sup>3</sup>. This scenario may vindicate the argument that free and even fair trade growth, without wealth redistribution mechanisms, fails to recognize the collapse of small scale household farming and pastoralism that is key to the survival of majority poor even in the fastest growing economies of Africa.

It is worth mentioning that the drought disaster in Northern Kenya was not sudden. Since early 2005, following a comprehensive Kenya Meteorological Department Early Warning Report on drought, the WFP and other international organisations and religious organisations have warned the international community and the Kenya government that the situation could get worse.

Interesting too is the fact that while Northern Kenya is in a dire situation of want, Western Kenya had a bumper harvest last year of cereals and is experiencing lack of market for their produce, a situation that is feared to discourage the farmers from farming this season.

It is instructive therefore to note that, the crisis in Northern Kenya is a product of inter-related political, historical, ecological and social and cultural factors that combine to create a permanent and cyclic situation of hunger and deprivation.

### **III. Key Underling Factors of the Famine in Northern Kenya**

#### **Historical Marginalisation of the Area**

The North-eastern province, the worst hit by the famine in Kenya is mainly inhabited by the Somali pastoralists and has since independence suffered marginalisation due to political, ecological and historical reasons. Covering an area of 127,000km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 962,143 (1999 census), this province is a semi-arid area. The Province has four administrative districts listed below with their administrative capitals:

- Garissa – capital Garissa
- Ijara – capital Ijara
- Wajir – capital Wajir
- Mandera – capital Mandera

Once known as the Northern Frontier District (NFD) under the colonial government, the Somali inhabitants around independence wanted to secede to Somalia to heed the expansionist policies of the then Somalia president Dr. Abdirashid Ali Sharmarky and later his successor and strongman Siad Barre who were pursuing a greater Somalia for the Somali people divided into the colonies of Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti and also the Republic of Ethiopia (Major Tom Wanambisi, 1984; The Somali Dispute: Kenya Beware). A civil

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<sup>3</sup> Office of Public Communications Government of Kenya Website

war ensued from 1964-1967 when the Somali in what was known as the Shifta war fought with the Kenya government forces before being violently crushed by in 1967. From then on until the onset of multi-party democracy in 1991-2, the region was under a state of emergency allowing only for relief supplies and little or sometimes virtually no long-term government development projects to benefit the people of this region.

### **A Conflict Affected Area**

Predominantly pastoralists, the Somali live in a conflict prone zone beset by cattle theft, primarily from marauding armed bandits and criminals from the failed state of Somalia. They also suffer regular bloody raids from the Oromo Liberation Front based in Ethiopia who steal livestock and kill people. A sparsely populated region, this province is poorly policed and is like a no man's land where crime is the rule rather than the exception exacerbated by the proliferation of small arms from the war infested neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Somalia.

This situation impacts negatively on the livelihoods of the communities there since free movement of people and goods is curtailed. For instance, travelling from Garissa to Wajir and Mandera, one needs a heavily armed police escort since running into bandit ambush on that route is very common. The insecurity in the area is a very big disincentive to investments in the region.

### **Government Policy and Priorities**

Kenya government's policy right from independence in 1963 balkanised the country into medium to high potential areas (receiving adequate rainfall that support agricultural activities) where infrastructure was readily provided and the now marginalised and hunger stricken areas that were classified as low potential areas (mostly dry and inhabited by pastoralists) with little or no development infrastructure to talk of (Sessional paper No. 1 of 1965, Government of Kenya). Unfortunately the areas that are classified as low potential comprise 80% of Kenya's land mass, leaving only a paltry 20% where most government development incentives and infrastructure has been concentrated. For instance in the government financial year 2005/6, Nyeri district in Central province of Kenya which is classified as a high potential area, 430 million Kenya shillings (USD 5.7 million) was allocated for water. On the other hand, in Turkana, one of the water stressed districts and now currently hard hit by the drought disaster, only 5 million Kenya shillings (USD 67,000) was allocated. This is despite the fact that household coverage of tap water is over 80% and natural streams are abundant in Nyeri district.

Kenya is touted as one of the fastest growing economies in Africa with flourishing trade and tourism sectors in a free –market driven economy. It is clear Kenya has created a very conducive policy environment for foreign and local private investments in all sectors. In the capital city, Nairobi, one could be amazed by the number of mega-supermarkets that are mushrooming everywhere.

However the situation in Northern Kenya is a living reflection of inadequacy of government policies and how misleading macroeconomic indicators can be as tools for measuring economic development in areas of great inequality. The current crisis reflects the tip of the iceberg and perhaps represents the collapse of household economies in most rural areas that depend on small scale farming and pastoralism. It is therefore little wonder that Nairobi and other major cities are experiencing overpopulation as a result of the rural urban migration with the resultant effect of growing slums with little or no social amenities at all for the people. Today, Maasai pastoralists have migrated and can be seen grazing their cattle beside the streets in Nairobi city demonstrating that development, as we know it in western terminology, has not responded to the needs of these people but has instead marginalised them and taken over their grazing fields.

#### **IV. Opportunity and Potential for Intervention: A Case for Common Response.**

ACORD believes that although the drought situation in Northern Kenya demands a rapid response immediately, in the medium term and long term, there is need for properly planned and executed development programmes that offer a lasting solution to the problems facing the people of this region.

ACORD believes a concerted response is necessary. Although there are interventions from other organisations like Oxfam GB, Care International, ActionAid, WFP, and the Red Cross, the Kenyan Ministry for Special Programmes says that only 17 out of the 37 districts requiring assistance are covered. This leaves 20 districts with no intervention at all.

There is therefore need for an urgent intervention to respond to the immediate needs of the communities now while plans are made to undertake studies that will inform long term engagement with the communities and other development actors to seek a lasting solution to the problems facing the people. Any support must be processed within the established Kenya government disaster response mechanism coordinated by the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) comprising membership from government, UN agencies and the civil society<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Contact ACORD:**

For further information about ACORD's response to this emergency, please contact:

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<sup>4</sup> ACORD was asked yesterday (17/01/2006) by the government to join this group and provide urgent support