

Tsunami worsens existing vulnerability in Somalia

by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Somalia

The tsunami compounded an already dire humanitarian situation, the result of persistent drought, unexpected freezing rains, cyclones, outbreaks of violence and periodic floods.

The tsunami struck just as the drought was coming to an end and livelihoods were beginning to recover from these multiple shocks. It affected large parts of the coast, particularly a stretch of 650 kilometres of coastline in the Puntland region, from Hafun in the north to Garacad further south. The impact of the tsunami resulted in loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, contamination of water sources and loss of livelihood assets. Around 44,000 people (roughly 7,300 households) required emergency humanitarian assistance, including drinking water, food and medication as well as support for the construction and/or rehabilitation of houses and shelter. The livelihoods of many people residing in coastal villages were also devastated.

Substantial numbers of Somalis migrate to the coast during the peak fishing season (October to February) to catch, process or market fish. The population density along the coastline was therefore unusually high at the time that the tsunami struck, resulting in the death and/or disappearance of 289 fishermen. The damage caused to the fishing industry, which is the main income-generating activity of coastal communities, was significant.

In pastoralist communities, it is common for some family members to migrate with the livestock for long periods of time every year in search of water and pasture, while the rest of the family remains in areas where they have access to basic services. Many pastoralists who had become destitute as a result of four consecutive years of persistent drought that decimated their herds had also moved to the coast in search of alternative livelihoods. Their few remaining resources were lost in the tsunami. For many pastoralists the

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The international community was quick to respond to the tsunami and provide relief to the affected communities, despite severe access problems, general insecurity, isolation and poor road infrastructure. In February 2005, an inter-agency, multi-sectoral assessment mission ascertained that the critical humanitarian needs of the affected population had been met largely due to pre-positioned relief stocks as well as additional stocks purchased with funds received through the Indian Ocean Flash Appeal. The mission recommended that while at least 40% of the affected population should continue to receive assistance and livelihood support until the next fishing season in October 2005, response plans should shift from emergency to recovery and rehabilitation activities

Currently, the Somalia UN Country Team is in the process of finalising an integrated development project for the tsunami-affected area. This will allow for additional tsunami-related responses to be integrated into the wider context of the serious humanitarian situation in Somalia. It will also ensure that the tsunami response is proportionate to and takes into consideration other humanitarian needs.

Apart from the tsunami-affected region, food and livelihood insecurity and overall vulnerability persist in various parts of Somalia. In its post *deyr* (short rains) assessment released in early 2005, the Food Security Analysis Unit of FAO highlighted the fact that more than 500,000 people continue to require urgent humanitarian assistance as a result of the underlying problem of environmental degradation, extended effects of droughts, floods, civil strife and ongoing barriers to trade. In addition, approximately 370,000 IDPs live in very poor and difficult conditions with minimum access to basic services and income-generating opportunities. In areas suffering from local conflicts and emerging from drought, high malnutrition rates of more than 20% have been recorded, particularly in some parts of Juba and Gedo regions.

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As the response to the tsunami has largely met the emergency needs of the affected populations, focus must now switch to these other vulnerable groups. With attention diverted toward the tsunami, other life-saving projects aimed at other equally if not more vulnerable groups risk being jeopardised. The need for equity and proportionality in resource allocation was echoed by a destitute pastoralist, who complained after seeing assistance go toward the tsunami-affected coast that “the only thing we eat is the dust left behind by your trucks.”

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