



## Horn of Africa humanitarian crisis, 2011

JUNE 2014

In 2011, a famine had devastating effects on people in Somalia and neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa. The region is economically under-developed, vulnerable to periodic and lengthy drought, and has a large number of extremely poor people. Food aid and other forms of assistance have been a lifeline for many in the region for well over a decade. A critical factor in the famine was the escalation of armed conflict in Somalia. Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group, controlled much of the worst affected area and made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to work. The severity of the famine was a consequence of the conflict and disruption of food aid in a prolonged drought.

Australia was one of the top five country donors to the crisis. The main priority for the Australian aid program was to get food assistance to affected people in Somalia and provide assistance for refugees. The speed with which funding was disbursed and strong alignment with the principles of good humanitarian donorship were notable strengths of Australian assistance. Australia's fast, effective and well-regarded

response is a testament to the hard work and dedication of staff in Nairobi and Canberra.

However, Australia, like other countries, did not commit major funding for the crisis until after famine was declared in July 2011. Many deaths could have been avoided with earlier action. Australia and other donors need to reflect on how to initiate responses to slow-onset crises.

Once famine was declared, Australia led early calls for the international community to respond and was one of the first donors to make major financial commitments. Australia's diplomacy and early-mover example helped encourage other donors to accept the risks of providing assistance in areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. This leadership is to Australia's credit.

In Nairobi, staff managing the Australian response also invested significant effort in getting donors and aid agencies to work together. Australia pushed for better coordination of food aid, advocating strongly for the food security 'cluster' to become operational and effective.

### HORN OF AFRICA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

- » The devastating famine in the Horn of Africa killed an estimated 257 500 people, about half of whom were under five years old.
- » The impact of the famine was greatest in Somalia, where it is estimated there were about 1.5 million internally displaced people and 4 million people in need of assistance. Neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia were also affected by drought and had to cope with food shortages as well as almost a million refugees from Somalia.
- » It was estimated that, in 2011, about 13.3 million people across the Horn of Africa needed help. As well as food and water, they needed shelter, protection, livelihood support and cash.
- » Australia contributed \$112 million to the international humanitarian effort in 2011. At the time, this made it Australia's largest-ever international disaster relief operation in financial terms.
- » The Australian public also contributed an additional \$13.6 million to the crisis through the innovative 'Dollar for Dollar Initiative' in which the government matched donations.
- » Australian assistance was delivered through partners. UN agencies, particularly the World Food Programme, received most of the funding. The remainder went to the Red Cross/ Crescent movement and 19 Australian-based non-government organisations.
- » Australia's home-based non-government organisation partnerships worked rapidly to mobilise assistance.
- » The exact number of lives saved by Australian assistance is hard to estimate, but it is clear that millions of people received much-needed assistance.



Volunteers from Somalia Red Crescent help newcomers set up a shelter in a camp for internally displaced people. Photo: Olav A Saltbones, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The evaluation found many positive aspects to the Australian response, as well as some lessons.

The first lesson is that the response needed more support internally. Australia is well rehearsed in responding to sudden-onset disasters nearer to home with rapid deployment of expert teams and administrators. But providing assistance in complex conflict-affected areas requires highly technical responses and liaison with multiple funding agencies. This calls for active management and close monitoring. Administrative procedures are needed for managing 'slow onset-crises' responses, including a strategy and staffing plan, which outline clear responsibilities and priorities.

### Recommendation 1

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) should develop procedures for responding to slow-onset humanitarian crises.

The second lesson is that the reporting of partners needs to be improved. Implementing partners, particularly UN agencies, did not consistently provide adequate reporting on what they did and achieved with Australian funds. Reporting requirements for NGOs were more stringent than those for UN agencies, but both need to provide better and timelier information.

### Recommendation 2

DFAT should develop clear measures of success for humanitarian action and ensure that funding agreements with partners include specific reporting against these measures.

The third lesson is that DFAT needs to improve their humanitarian expertise and to exploit international humanitarian knowledge and networks. This should improve how valuable resources are used and provide greater stewardship of humanitarian responses.

### Recommendation 3

DFAT should continue to build humanitarian cadre and expertise.



Australian assistance provided through the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement was used by CARE to provide water in Dadaab camp in northern Kenya. Photo: Kate Holt, CARE Australia.

*The unconditional cash and voucher response ... quickly achieved an impressive scale, building principally on international and Somali NGO field capacity. The evidence marshalled in this evaluation suggests that cash and vouchers made a quantifiable difference in reducing hunger and improving food security, enabling a more rapid recovery than would have been possible without assistance.*

K Hedlund, N Majid, D Maxwell & N Nicholson, *Final evaluation of the unconditional cash and voucher response to the 2011–12 crisis in southern and central Somalia*, Humanitarian Outcomes & UNICEF, 2012.

### Australian aid performance against good humanitarian principles

Principles area	Compliance	Performance (score)
Humanitarian principles	Excellent	6/6
General principles	Adequate (need to drive accountability and resilience)	8/12
Funding	Good	7/8
Promoting standards and enhancing implementation	Good	9/12
Learning and accountability	Adequate (need to push transparency and support sector learning)	4/6

The fourth lesson is the need to be flexible and innovative to improve effectiveness. For example, options for cash-transfer programming—providing cash as an alternative to in-kind humanitarian aid (such as food, shelter, medicine, household items)—should be routinely considered. In severely affected areas, Al-Shabaab control made it increasingly difficult, costly and dangerous to get food to those in need. Cash transfers proved an effective way of overcoming these constraints and were used on a massive scale during the crisis. It was found that cash transfers attracted merchants, enabled people to buy food, benefited both men and women and resulted in little diversion or stealing.

#### Recommendation 4

DFAT should continue to improve the quality, timeliness and focus of its operations, changing emphasis as evidence proves the efficacy of new or amended approaches.

The fifth lesson is that mechanisms to fund non-government organisations could be improved. Funding mechanisms need to be able to target partner organisations best suited to respond, and also be administratively efficient. Australia should be prepared to fund well-placed organisations that do not have an Australian base. Additionally, any scheme to engage public support should be planned in advance so funding processes are more efficient and assistance can reach those in need more quickly.

#### Recommendation 5

DFAT should develop strategies to better mobilise resources in response to slow-onset humanitarian crises.

The sixth lesson is that Australia should improve liaison with other donors and organisations in regions outside the traditional geographic focuses of the aid program, particularly in 'at-risk' areas or regions. This means having experts on the ground, in embassies and working with partners, and identifying opportunities for delegated cooperation and shared resources.

#### Recommendation 6

DFAT should increase humanitarian liaison capacity in regions outside the traditional geographic focuses of the aid program.

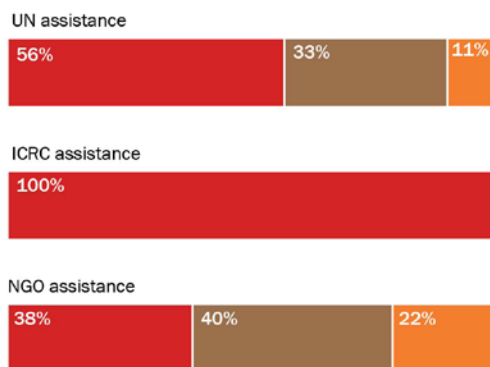
#### Number of beneficiaries of Australian assistance by agency



UN funds reach **2,330,000** beneficiaries  
 NGO funds reach **1,160,000** beneficiaries  
 ICRC and Australian Red Cross funds reach **380,000** beneficiaries

ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross; NGO = non-government organisation; UN = United Nations

#### Australian financial assistance, by type of agency and country



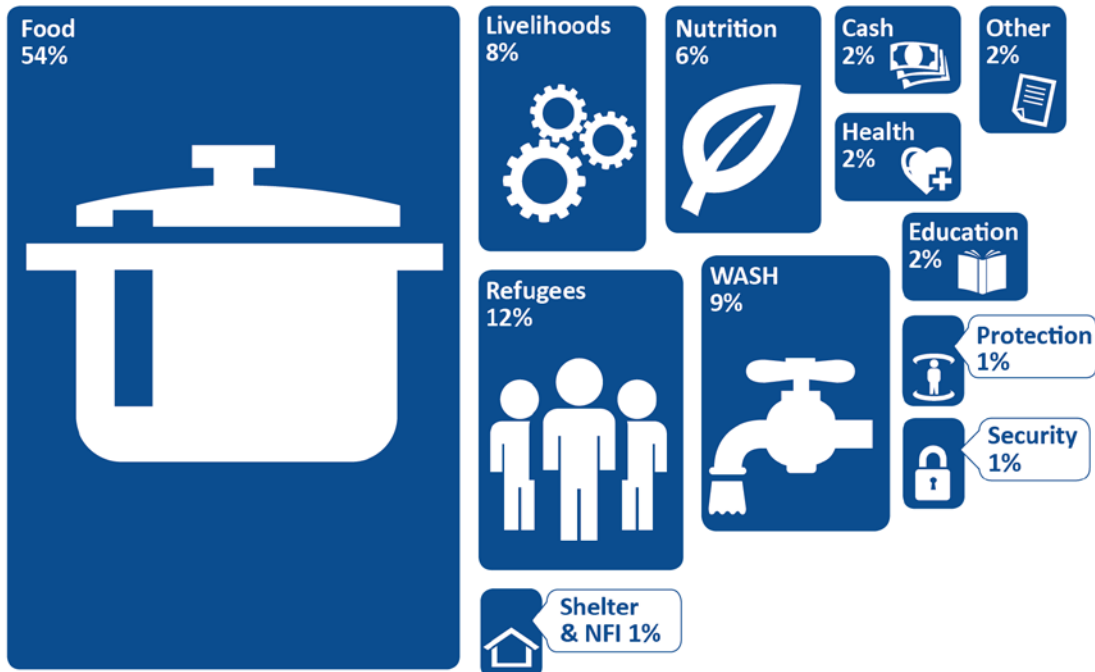
ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross; NGO = non-government organisation; UN = United Nations



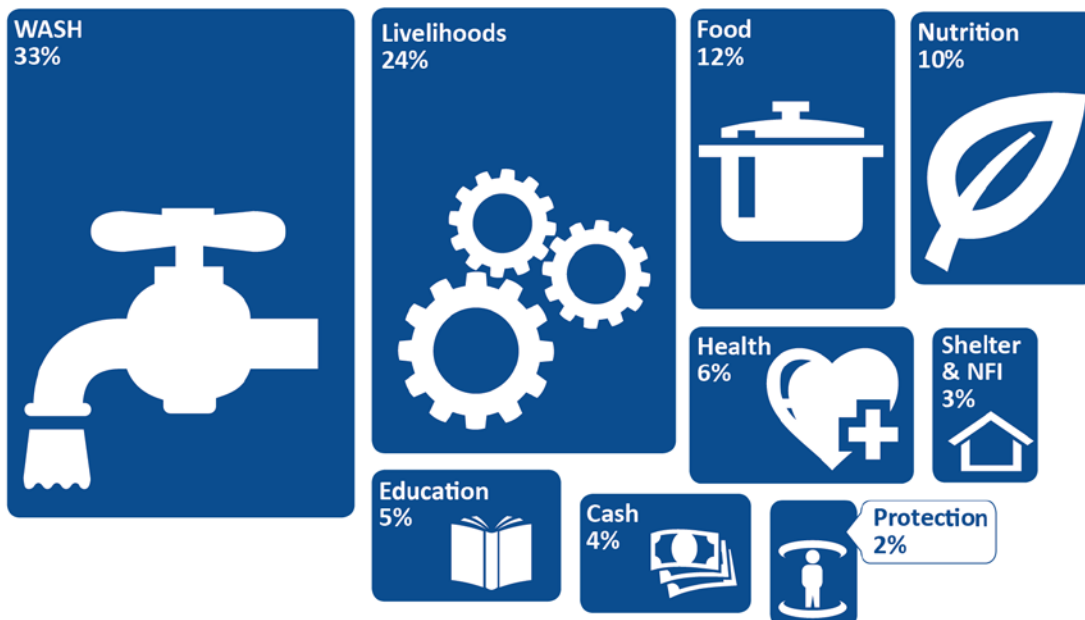
Internally displaced people in the Sigale Camp, Mogadishu, Somalia. Photo: Graham Mathieson, Save the Children

## Funding allocations

All partners (UN agencies, Red Cross and NGOs)



Partners funded through the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement and the Dollar for Dollar Initiative (mainly NGOs)



NFI = non-food items; WASH = water, sanitation and hygiene

### OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) monitors the performance of the Australian aid program, evaluates its impact and contributes to international evidence and debate about aid and development effectiveness.

The full report, including a management response from DFAT, can be accessed at [www.ode.dfat.gov.au](http://www.ode.dfat.gov.au)