



Evaluation of Australia's response to the Horn of Africa humanitarian crisis, 2011

Office of Development Effectiveness

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Cover photograph: 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.*

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Foreword

Humanitarian aid is often delivered in difficult circumstances, at a rapid pace and is expected to serve various and competing needs. When done well, humanitarian relief operations have the capacity to save thousands of lives. In almost all humanitarian crises, the needs of affected populations far exceed resources available. It is crucial, therefore, that humanitarian assistance focuses on providing as many people as possible with the help they need.

Evaluations can ask important questions about operations, outcomes and the broader humanitarian system. These studies are vital to capture learning and improve future responses. This is the first ODE evaluation that has examined humanitarian assistance and I found that more came out of the evaluation than I expected.

Overall this is a very strong evaluation report which, although focused on a slow-onset crisis, makes recommendations that are widely applicable and should change Australia's humanitarian programming for the better. This report identifies many strengths of the Australian response to the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa in 2011. At the time, humanitarian operations in severely affected areas were fraught with danger and were extremely difficult. Australia was a new player compared to other donors with years of experience in the region and a much larger presence on the ground. The Australian aid program responded quickly with a sound program, despite limited capacity and experience in the region. This should be commended.

The speed and flexibility of operations were notable strengths of the Australian response. Australian funds clearly saved lives; however, the results depended on more than funds alone. Effective coordination of response efforts is a persistent challenge for the global humanitarian system. Australia's role in influencing implementing partners and coordinating important aspects of the overall system increased the effectiveness of Australian assistance, and the overall international response. The report shows that among the small numbers of staff at post, there were obviously some heroes, and they did a great job.

Another clear finding is the need for funded agencies to improve reporting on activities and results. The reporting is essential for learning and to ensure informed decisions are made. The evaluation recommendations in areas such as these are designed to improve the effectiveness of Australian humanitarian assistance in the future.

Finally, the evaluation rightly highlights the complexity of disaster situations, which are growing in number and severity and will continue to pose a challenge for Australia in their commitment to supporting humanitarian work in the Indo-Pacific.



Jim Adams

Chair, Independent Evaluation Committee

Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgments	6
Executive summary	7
Management response.....	11
1 Introduction.....	15
1.1 Purpose	15
1.2 Methodology	15
2 Context.....	18
2.1 The 2011 Horn of Africa crisis.....	18
2.2 Entrenched ecological and livelihood vulnerability.....	18
2.3 Conflict and instability	19
2.4 The need for humanitarian assistance.....	20
2.5 The context of humanitarian operations in Somalia	22
3 The Australian response.....	24
3.1 Scale of funding	24
3.2 Triggers and constraints	25
3.3 Strategic approach.....	27
3.4 Funding by partner.....	28
3.5 Timeliness of funding for United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.....	31
3.6 Timeliness of funding for non-government organisations.....	31
3.7 Country allocations	32
3.8 Funding by sector and form of assistance	32
4 Delivery of Australian assistance.....	35
4.1 Leadership and advocacy	35
4.2 Coordination	36
4.3 Staffing levels and support.....	36
4.4 Flexibility of funding	38
4.5 Monitoring partner performance.....	39
4.6 Choice of implementing partners	40
4.7 Appropriateness of NGO funding mechanisms.....	44
4.8 Appropriateness of sectoral funding	46
4.9 Appropriateness of modes of assistance	48

5	Responding to needs.....	49
5.1	Gender.....	49
5.2	Local capacities and priorities.....	51
5.3	Beneficiary participation.....	52
5.4	Addressing vulnerabilities	53
5.5	Protection.....	54
5.6	Recovery and resilience.....	54
6	Achievements of Australian assistance	56
6.1	Impact of the international response.....	56
6.2	Partner reporting on results	58
6.3	Value for money.....	61
6.4	Alignment with principles of good humanitarian donorship	62
7	Recommendations.....	64
	Abbreviations and acronyms	66
	References.....	67

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This evaluation was led by Lewis Sida, with Dr Hugo Slim and Dr Karen Ovington as the other principal team members. Anais Resseguier and Shams Tazi analysed the data. The gender analysis was led by Deborah Clifton and research work in Kenya was carried out by Joyce Njagi. Alistair Hallam at Valid International provided quality advice and oversight.

This evaluation was managed by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) at the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Dr Karen Ovington led the process, ably supported by Amy Williams. Dr Helen Cheney, Director of the Evaluation Section, provided methodological input and advice, as did the head of ODE, Mr Dereck Rooker-Smith. DFAT's Independent Evaluation Committee was responsible for ensuring independence, rigour and a quality process.

The evaluation was largely completed before the announcement of the integration of AusAID with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The report has been revised to reflect the new, integrated DFAT. Any references to AusAID in the report relate to the former agency.

The evaluation team and ODE would like to thank implementing partners, as well as DFAT staff in Canberra and Nairobi for their collaboration and cooperation throughout the evaluation process. The team would also like to thank Steve Darvill, DFAT humanitarian adviser, who provided valuable inputs.

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Executive summary

This evaluation examines the effectiveness of Australian humanitarian assistance provided in 2011 in response to a crisis in the Horn of Africa (HoA), a region well known for its chronic vulnerability. This evaluation identifies how the Australian aid program can improve the effectiveness of responses to future slow-onset crises.

Context

In 2011, a devastating famine in the riverine areas of south-central Somalia killed an estimated 257 500 people, about half of whom were under five years old. Drought was one of the main causes of the crisis, along with rising food prices. Neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia, which were also affected by drought, had to cope with food shortages as well as refugee flows from Somalia. The other main causes of the crisis were armed conflict and the actions of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, which controlled much of the most seriously affected areas. It was estimated that, in 2011, about 13.3 million people across the HoA needed multiple forms of assistance.

The Australian response

Australia contributed a total of \$112 million to the international humanitarian effort in 2011. This made it Australia's largest-ever international disaster relief operation in financial terms. Australia was one of the top five country donors to the crisis in absolute terms and as a proportion of gross domestic product. The scale of Australia's response was in keeping with the magnitude of the crisis.

Main findings

Australia, like other countries, did not commit major funding for the crisis until after famine was declared in Somalia in July 2011. Many deaths could have been avoided with earlier action. Australia, along with other donors, needs to reflect on how to initiate responses before crises escalate.

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 make other donors willing to accept the risks of providing assistance in areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. This leadership is to Australia's credit.

Priorities

The main priority for the Australian aid program was to get food assistance to affected people in Somalia and provide assistance for refugees. This made strategic sense, because the epicentre of the famine was in southern Somalia, where access to food was the critical issue, and the crisis caused a large-scale movement of people within and away from Somalia.

The Australian aid program in Nairobi invested significant effort in getting donors and aid agencies to work together. In particular, the Nairobi team supported the overall United Nations (UN) official in charge, the humanitarian coordinator, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Australia also helped to push for better coordination of food aid, advocating strongly for the food security 'cluster' to become operational and effective.

Partners

Australian assistance was delivered exclusively through partners. UN agencies received the bulk of the funding—some \$87.5 million, with a heavy prioritisation of the World Food Programme (WFP), which received \$57 million. The remaining \$24.5 million went to the Australian Red Cross Society and 19 Australian-based non-government organisations (NGOs).

Australian NGOs were funded through two mechanisms that had not been previously used: the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) and the Dollar for Dollar Initiative. Both schemes had strengths and weaknesses. A notable achievement of the HPA was the rapid, efficient disbursement of funds to the preselected group of NGOs. Strengths of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative were engaging the public and increasing the level of funding for the crisis. However, the Australian NGOs funded through both schemes were not always those organisations best placed to provide the most needed assistance. Another drawback of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative was that it took considerable time to establish so that funds were not available until after the peak of the crisis. The large number of partner organisations also made it administratively burdensome.

Results

The speed with which funding was disbursed following commitments being made and strong alignment with the principles of good humanitarian donorship are notable strengths of Australian assistance. Australia's fast, effective and well-regarded response is a testament to the hard work of and incredible dedication of aid program staff both in Nairobi and Canberra.

With WFP as its main partner, Australian aid did not reach the neediest areas as quickly as intended because the agency was blocked from working in these areas by Al-Shabaab, and WFP took time to scale up its operations. Some agencies funded by Australia did manage to deliver humanitarian assistance in the worst-affected areas at the peak of the crisis. The International Committee of the Red Cross fed more than a million people. The UN Children's Fund, UN Food and Agriculture Organization and some NGOs provided assistance using cash transfers. These transfers were a major success in attracting traders, bringing down food prices and giving people more choice overall.

Largely due to Australian support, WFP became operational in Mogadishu, where a large number of internally displaced persons had gathered. WFP used Australia-funded food to help famine victims directly. Australian funds assisted refugees in Kenya through both the WFP and the UN High Commission for Refugees.

Most funding was focused on food assistance and support for displaced people as intended, but all sectors were supported. The severity of the crisis meant that affected people had needed multiple forms of assistance—including water, shelter, protection, livelihood support and cash. All sectors were supported by Australian assistance as a result of funding to NGOs.

After the international response scaled up the combined efforts of the major donors (including Australia) and agencies led to dramatic reductions in mortality rates in Somalia. The exact number of lives saved by Australian assistance is hard to estimate, but it is clear that many people, and possibly millions of people, received much needed assistance.

Lessons

This evaluation has found many positive aspects to the Australian response, as well as some significant lessons.

The first major lesson is that the response needed more support internally. Australia is well rehearsed in responding to sudden-onset natural disasters nearer home with rapid deployment of expert teams and administrators. In the HoA, the workload involved in using partners was underestimated. Providing assistance in complex conflict-affected areas needs highly technical responses and liaising with multiple funding agencies, which requires active management and close monitoring. In the future, a set of administrative procedures for managing these spikes in 'slow onset-crises' responses need to be established as they have been for rapid-onset disasters. This would mean rapidly developing a strategy and staffing plan, as well as making sure responsibilities and priorities are clear.

Recommendation 1

DFAT should **develop procedures for responding to slow-onset** humanitarian crises.

The second clear 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 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 humanitarian expertise needs to be enhanced in DFAT 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**.

The fourth lesson is the need to be flexible and innovative in ways that improve effectiveness. For example, options for cash-transfer programming, which was effective in the crisis, should be routinely considered by DFAT. The use of UN-pooled funds could be further exploited, especially if the speed with which UN agencies disburse funds can be improved.

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 NGOs 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 NGOs that do not have an Australian base. Additionally, any scheme to engage public support should be planned in advance so funding can be provided in a timely fashion.

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 when working in regions outside the traditional geographic focuses of the aid program. This means having experts on the ground, in embassies or working with partners. Having experts in liaison roles in key 'at-risk' areas or regions is a good investment for humanitarian responses.

Recommendation 6

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

Management response

The evaluation of Australia's response to the Horn of Africa humanitarian crisis, 2011 was a well-planned and executed review and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) thanks the review team for their extensive work—the review is of a high standard. DFAT welcomes the review team's articulation of the achievements and its frankness in expressing some of the challenges encountered in the Horn of Africa response. While the review examines assistance provided in the Horn of Africa, DFAT considers that the review and its recommendations provide useful lessons to inform both future humanitarian responses and aid programming more broadly than the Horn of Africa region and the management responses are framed in this light.

Overall, DFAT welcomes the findings of the evaluation and agrees or partially agrees with all the recommendations and has already made some progress in addressing key findings. DFAT makes particular note of observations that suggest that most of DFAT's current procedures are geared towards delivery of humanitarian assistance in the context of rapid-onset crises in the Indo-Pacific region.

DFAT agrees there is a need for clearer triggers to activate stand-by mechanisms and funding for rapid-onset crises in protracted settings. The challenge of committing funding prior to declaration of a disaster is shared with many other donors. However, as the review team recognised, Australia responded appropriately once the disaster was declared. The Australian Government responded quickly and showed strong leadership in marshalling support from other donors. DFAT will build on this positive finding and provide greater clarity to our partners in the global humanitarian system about the scale and scope of Australian support in slow-onset and protracted crises beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

Since the Horn of Africa crisis, DFAT has undertaken development programming in the area of food security, economic recovery, and resilience in Africa to reduce the likelihood of large numbers of people falling back into humanitarian crises when shocks hit. Australia has maintained its focus on a number of priority humanitarian situations where there are high levels of need and we have been able to build on assistance provided in previous years.

The way Australian aid is managed and delivered has gone through significant changes since the Horn of Africa response. DFAT assumed responsibility for providing advice to the government on aid policy and managing Australia's overseas aid program on 1 November 2013, following the abolition of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) as an Executive Agency. Integration will enable DFAT to better pursue Australia's national interests by ensuring closer alignment and mutually reinforcing linkages among the government's aid, foreign affairs and trade efforts. Integration will deliver efficiencies and strengthen our capacity to pursue our national interests abroad. Within this context, the unique challenges of humanitarian crises have been recognised through the retention of a stand-alone Humanitarian Division. The Humanitarian Division will maintain its level of specialised capabilities across the spectrum of humanitarian activities, from risk reduction and resilience building to response and recovery. The Humanitarian Division provides advice, expertise and additional funding when necessary to help guide country program responses to humanitarian crises.

Recommendation		Management response
<p>1. DFAT should develop procedures for responding to slow-onset humanitarian crises.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A simple activation mechanism that identifies which section is in the lead and the likely level of financial commitment. ii. A strategy development process that sets priorities, targets specific outcomes, shapes the funding portfolio and identifies activities distinct from funding needed to increase the effectiveness of Australian assistance. iii. Key elements of a staffing plan with an appropriate surge capacity to ensure requisite human resources to deliver and monitor humanitarian assistance. The plan should include support for staff to deal with the stresses of their work, as well as monitoring of workloads and wellbeing of staff by individuals not involved in the response. 	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>DFAT's Humanitarian Response Branch, in consultation with geographical Branches and Posts will develop guidelines to provide predictability for responses to escalations in slow-onset and protracted crises. These procedures will include guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › how to determine which part of the department is to lead on protracted crisis responses › the process to develop strategies for responses to protracted crises › how to set priorities based on the strategic intent and likely financial commitment, and what key considerations should be taken into account if that strategic intent changes › what procedures will be put in place to provide adequate support to staff on desk and at post and monitor workloads and wellbeing. <p>Procedures for responding to humanitarian crises have been strengthened since the Horn of Africa crisis in 2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › All officers deployed for humanitarian emergency responses are subject to psychological and medical screening prior to deployment and on return. Support is extended to officers working on responses in Canberra also to ensure staff are adequately supported during periods of high workload or stress. › Officers deployed to posts or the field are provided with a detailed terms of reference prior to their deployment to ensure the parameters of their work are well understood, the security environment is appropriate and work health safety risks are identified with mitigation strategies in place. <p>However, many of these procedures apply to rapid-onset disasters in the Indo-Pacific region. DFAT will examine how these procedures may be adapted to better prepare and deploy surge capacity in other contexts, in line with the government's strategic intent.</p>
<p>2. DFAT should develop clear measures of success for humanitarian action and ensure that funding agreements with partners include specific reporting against these measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Identify measureable indicators for strategic outcomes, such as food security, protection and resilience. ii. Work with partners to develop better outcome monitoring systems and to ensure more equitable outcomes for ethnic minority groups, women and children. iii. Set out reporting requirements in formal agency-level grant agreements with implementing partners, especially United Nations agencies. This reporting should include detailed financial accounting, as well as specific reporting on outputs and outcomes achieved. iv. Work with key partners to develop thinking about value for money in humanitarian action. Consider developing a 'library' of costs that can be used as benchmarks for programming in various contexts. 	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>The Australian Government's development policy—<i>Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability</i>—will guide the allocation of aid and drive reforms to the way Australian aid is managed at the country, sectoral and global levels.</p> <p>Linked to this policy, the Making Performance Count performance framework will improve aid program performance, value for money and results.</p> <p>By December 2014, DFAT will review standard reporting clauses and formats for Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) partners, the Australian Red Cross (ARC) and deployed Australian experts including medical teams, RedR Australia, DFAT Rapid Response Team (RRT) members and Australian Civilian Corps (ACC) deployees.</p> <p>DFAT will continue to advocate for greater disaggregation of data by multilateral partners.</p> <p>In negotiating agreements with UN partners, DFAT will seek to include clearer reporting requirements, bearing in mind that Australia has a commitment to harmonise reporting through the Good Humanitarian Donorship process.</p> <p>DFAT will also encourage UN partners to publish International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)-compliant data to strengthen transparency of humanitarian aid flows globally.</p>

<p>3. DFAT should continue to build humanitarian cadre and expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Increase in-house knowledge in key areas that are essential to understanding and responding to slow-onset crises, notably early warning, early action, resilience and multiyear funding. ii. Identify the most appropriate types and level of technical specialism and niche roles for the Australian aid program in chronic food and protracted conflict emergencies, and improve and increase skills in these areas. iii. Continue to invest in policy and advocacy capacity to engage with the humanitarian system, contributing to its overall effectiveness. iv. Ensure there are sufficient geographical humanitarian positions to be prepared for spikes in crises. v. Adapt surge-capacity arrangements to bring in humanitarian skills to support programs dealing with slow-onset emergencies at short notice.. 	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>DFAT will continue to support the development of humanitarian expertise as an important part of maintaining Australian response capacity in rapid, slow-onset and protracted crises.</p> <p>Since 2011, DFAT has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > engaged a humanitarian adviser > established a stand-alone Humanitarian Division > maintained a pool of trained staff able to deploy at short notice > established a period offer to access specialist logistics services > built a register of 514 ACC deployees > supported the international accreditation of two Australian urban search and rescue teams > trained a national cadre of Australian Medical Assistance > supported over 200 RedR specialists, many of whom have been deployed to protracted crises such as South Sudan, Myanmar, Chad and the Central African Republic. <p>DFAT also provides specialist training programs for key staff involved in the management of crises, as well as specific regional training for the Pacific and South-east Asia each year. Where individual posts or divisions are identified as requiring further capacity development, the Humanitarian Division provides additional support to ensure a greater depth of knowledge (e.g. in January 2014, specific training for the Manila post was identified as a key lesson learned from the Typhoon Haiyan Response and was delivered in May 2014).</p> <p>The Humanitarian Division will incorporate protracted crises as a theme for the Humanitarian Focal Point network. This will increase in-house knowledge around operating in protracted crises. Geographic programs and staff at Posts will be encouraged to share lessons and seek advice on common issues, such as early warning signals, multi-year humanitarian funding, remote monitoring and humanitarian reform in these contexts.</p> <p>DFAT agrees in principle that there is a need for further support to geographic programs and staff at Posts and will examine options to improve surge-capacity. This could include specialist training programs for staff who may be involved in the management of crises, as well as specific regional training.</p>
<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Routinely consider options for cash-transfer programming and ensure partners consider this as a first rather than a last option. Ensure cash is targeted at women where appropriate. ii. Devolve decision-making to humanitarian and geographical professionals on technical issues where possible, and to Post and field teams where there is sufficient capacity. iii. Continue to investigate with others how early warning data can be translated into early and appropriate action. 	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Australia will continue to be an effective and principled humanitarian donor and will help build the resilience of countries and communities to disasters, conflict and economic shocks.</p> <p>DFAT will continue to invest in innovations that improve the quality of DFAT's humanitarian assistance.</p> <p>In line with the Australian Government's focus on economic diplomacy, DFAT will advocate for increased private sector investment in the humanitarian sector in international fora, including the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action II.</p> <p>DFAT will deliver on our Good Humanitarian Donorship commitments to provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development as well as maintain human dignity.</p> <p>In line with international best practice, DFAT will continue to promote awareness of the use of cash transfers in crisis situations and the scope for channelling assistance to crisis-affected populations through long-term social protection schemes.</p> <p>DFAT will harness the opportunities provided by the closer alignment of Australia's foreign and development policy portfolios to strengthen humanitarian advocacy for early action.</p>

<p>5. DFAT should develop strategies to better mobilise resources in response to slow-onset humanitarian crises.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. In partnership with Australian Council for International Development and the private sector, explore innovative public fundraising and outreach that builds on the success of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative. ii. Examine options for a mechanism like the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement that can be adapted to different contexts and geographic locations. iii. Continue to use pooled funding-type arrangements such as the United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund, but work with the United Nations to speed up disbursement. iv. Develop new mechanisms, or modify existing ones, to fund non-government organisations directly, including those without an Australian base, where they are clearly the best placed to deliver lifesaving assistance. v. Ensure that the speed of disbursement seen in the Horn of Africa crisis is maintained. 	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>DFAT acknowledges that there is significant scope to mobilise resources beyond the aid program. DFAT will engage with the private sector and the Australian Council for International Development to identify areas of mutual interest that might be harnessed to complement Australian Government funding in the event of slow-onset crises.</p> <p>DFAT will also promote public-private sector partnerships within the framework of global dialogues, such as the 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action II and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, to increasingly harness the experience, ideas and resources of the private sector in support of global humanitarian systems and action.</p> <p>DFAT notes the concerns regarding slow disbursement of pooled funds and will continue to advocate for more streamlined and accountable processes in fora such as the Central Emergency Relief Fund and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.</p> <p>The HPA mechanism will remain the primary channel providing for humanitarian funding through non-government organisations (NGO) in rapid onset crises. DFAT will continue to examine, on a case-by-case basis, whether this mechanism is suitable for slow-onset and protracted crises.</p> <p>In selecting NGO partners to respond to a specific emergency, DFAT will consider their effectiveness and capacity to deliver an appropriate, effective, timely, efficient and accountable response. Australian NGOs will remain valuable partners in Australia's humanitarian programs but local and international NGOs may be preferred where they are best placed to respond.</p>
<p>6. DFAT should increase humanitarian liaison capacity in regions outside the traditional geographic focuses of the aid program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Strengthen working relationships with humanitarian counterparts in other donor missions to identify division of labour opportunities, including options for delegated cooperation and/or shared resources. ii. Invest in coordination at a country level, either through direct hosting arrangements (as with the donor coordination for Somalia) or through personnel deployments into the United Nations system. 	<p>Agreed-in-principle. This recommendation needs to be considered in light of the Australian Government's commitments to focus engagement on the Indo-Pacific region.</p>	<p>DFAT will continue to foster and demonstrate humanitarian leadership and support crisis responses in regions where Australia has an enduring interest. This will include partnering with multilateral organisations, regional organisations, other donors and partner countries to extend our capacity to deliver effective humanitarian responses.</p>

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of Australia's response to the food security and refugee crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya in 2011, known as the Horn of Africa (HoA) crisis. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify how to improve the effectiveness of Australian humanitarian assistance to future slow-onset crises. The areas of enquiry were:

- › how Australian responded
- › how Australian assistance was delivered
- › how well the needs of affected people were met
- › achievements of the Australian response.

1.2 Methodology

Process

The evaluation aimed to be participatory while maintaining rigour and evidence standards. The first step was to develop an evaluation plan that outlined the methods and timeframe. This was circulated to internal stakeholders for comment and was subject to scrutiny by the Independent Evaluation Committee.

Interviews with stakeholders were conducted face to face in Canberra, Melbourne and Nairobi, or by telephone. These interviews were complemented by an intensive process of collecting, sifting and analysing reports, the academic and grey literature, and other relevant material.

The evaluation sought to triangulate findings through a variety of means. This included a review of evaluative material examining the performance of the Australian aid program and implementing partners, as well as general findings relating to areas of the response that Australia funded. The analytical process included an interrogation of financial data with a view to understanding sector and geographic coverage, and for collating and codifying results data. Interviews were written up and analysed for patterns and common themes. An initial feedback session was held in Nairobi and a validation workshop presented initial findings in Canberra to begin the process of developing recommendations.

Evidence

Interviews focused on staff in the Australian aid program, implementing partners and donor organisations (Table 1). The interviews were semi structured, loosely following the four areas of enquiry. They were a strong source of evidence. People were generally candid and frank, and appeared comfortable to share all forms of information verbally. Interviews provided a high degree of consistent information, with major themes emerging quickly. Workshops were held with staff from the

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to develop recommendations, and focus group discussions were undertaken with beneficiary communities in northern Kenya.

Table 1 Number and type of interviews

Organisation	Number of people interviewed or consulted
Canberra and Melbourne	
AusAID (now DFAT)	Africa Branch (5), Humanitarian Preparedness and Response Branch (8), other (5)
NGOs	Australian Council for International Development (1), Australian Red Cross (2), CARE (2), Oxfam (2), Save the Children (1), Plan (2), World Vision International (2)
Nairobi / Wajir	
AusAID (now DFAT)	Nairobi Post (5 interviewed, another 5 included in briefing or feedback sessions)
NGOs	Arid Land Development Focus (2), CARE (2), Caritas (10), Oxfam (7), Plan (3), Save the Children (5), Wajir South Development Association (2), World Vision International (2)
UN	UN Children’s Fund (2), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (2), UN High Commission for Refugees, Kenya (2), UN High Commission for Refugees, Somalia (2), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (1), UN World Food Programme Kenya (9), UN World Food Programme Somalia (2)
Red Cross	International Committee of the Red Cross (2), International Federation of the Red Cross (2)
Donors	Denmark (1), Department for International Development, United Kingdom (2), European Community Humanitarian Office (2), Netherlands (1), Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, United States (2)
Beneficiaries	Three focus groups of beneficiaries from Oxfam (12), Save the Children (5) and UN World Food Programme (15)
Total	137 people interviewed or consulted

AusAID = Australian Agency for International Development; DFAT = Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; NGO = non-government organisation; UN = United Nations

The secondary data analysis used two main sources of information—agency reporting and external material relating either to the HoA crisis or to the international aid operation. This latter category included evaluations and academic literature (Table 2).

A number of ways were used to review the secondary data. A trawl of the academic literature and general evaluative publications was undertaken to draw out key general lessons appropriate to countries, sectors or agencies, and to look for specific mentions of Australia or AusAID. The documentation provided by the Australian aid program and its partners was reviewed to inform the narrative and factual base for this evaluation, as well as for any pertinent lessons. Reports of, financial allocations and beneficiary numbers were reviewed to compile new analyses of results including where funds were spent and how many people were assisted.

To make evaluative judgements, the extensive humanitarian experience of the team and their knowledge of the HoA crisis were used, along with the evidence gathered in the course of this evaluation. For details of the strength of evidence in each of the areas of enquiry, see Table 3.

Table 2 Type of secondary data review

Type	Number of documents
Academic and grey literature	81
Review of relevant evaluations	32
Australian aid program and implementing partner reports	99
Total	212

Table 3 Strength of the evidence

Area of enquiry	Data source	Analysis	Strength of evidence
The Australian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › stakeholder interviews › internal reports › workshops › literature › evaluation reports 	Internal paper trail clear; interviews consistent; good body of literature; timeliness, influencing and staffing issues clear	Strong
Delivery of Australian assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › stakeholder interviews › internal reports › workshops 	Internal paper trail clear; interviews consistent; timeliness, influencing and staffing issues clear	Strong
Responsiveness to the needs of affected people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › interviews › beneficiary focus groups › literature › agency reports 	Interviews, focus groups and documentation consistent; timeliness, influencing and staffing issues clear	Adequate
Achievements of the Australian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › interviews › beneficiary focus groups › literature › agency reports 	Few real facts on outcomes or impact beyond the recent mortality study, ¹ value for money unclear due to data limitations and definitions	Weak

Limitations

The evaluation was mostly based on secondary data. The strength of the findings was dependent on the quality and quantity of data provided, which was less than ideal. There were significant gaps in data and information. Some of this is understandable given the context, because it is difficult to monitor and collect data in humanitarian and conflict situations. Deficiencies in reporting, however, also stem from poor practice in the humanitarian sector, which traditionally has not prioritised accountability (either to donors or beneficiaries) and has not invested in rigorous measurement of effectiveness. Some agencies were reluctant to generate additional information for this evaluation. The United Nations (UN) system proved the most problematic in terms of providing both budgetary analysis and numbers of people reached or assisted. This was primarily because the reporting that Australia requires from these agencies is minimal. Since UN agencies received the bulk of funds, evidence on results is weak.

2 Context

2.1 The 2011 Horn of Africa crisis

The 2011 Horn of Africa (HoA) crisis had devastating effects on Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Its impact was greatest in Somalia, where the catastrophic combination of drought and conflict took place against a backdrop of progressive deterioration in environmental and social conditions.

The crisis grew in the very heartland of modern international humanitarian action, around its oldest and most intense operational hub—Nairobi. Since the 1970s, humanitarian, political and military operations have responded to a succession of conflicts, droughts, famines and refugee crises across the HoA. The humanitarian community is probably more entrenched in this region than in any other part of the world. This density of humanitarian capacity across the region explains why the crisis in Ethiopia and Kenya was so effectively managed in most areas. Paradoxically, it may also explain why the tragic famine that took shape in Somalia was initially so hard to see amid the conflict, chronic uncertainty and remote management that has characterised humanitarian action in Somalia for many years.

The HoA crisis was not the only major international crisis in 2011–12. The Libya crisis was in full swing—international military intervention started in March 2011. The Syrian uprising also began in March 2011 and quickly deteriorated into civil war. More widely, the ‘Arab spring’ started in December 2010 and was continuing around the Middle East and North Africa. All these events demanded political, humanitarian and media attention that competed with the HoA crisis. However, in 2011, no other event would result in as many deaths as the HoA crisis.

2.2 Entrenched ecological and livelihood vulnerability

The HoA has a long history of drought and increasing livelihood vulnerability resulting in long-term aid dependency. From 2010, specific global weather effects (La Niña) resulted in a number of poor and intermittent rains.^{2,3} This weather effect severely impacted on livelihoods, particularly in pastoral areas and the delicate riverine agricultural area of south-central Somalia.

People in the affected areas have a mix of livelihoods including pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and farming. Pastoralist livelihoods had been under threat before the crisis, with increasing inequalities emerging within pastoralist groups. Some pastoralists adapted well, increasing their market linkages and trade with the Middle East. These pastoralist ‘winners’ stood in marked contrast to an increasing number of pastoralist ‘drop-outs’, forced out of a pastoralist livelihood by repeated shocks in recent years, and other pastoralist ‘losers’ who were just clinging on.⁴ Gender and socioeconomic inequality

are also entrenched across the region. This mix of factors required any humanitarian response to be highly sensitive to the different livelihoods, coping mechanisms and vulnerabilities.^a

When the crisis began, the international humanitarian community had developed a strong understanding of vulnerability and need in the region's sedentary agricultural populations, largely through the household food economy model pioneered in the 1990s.⁵ This knowledge and practice was generally widespread through the humanitarian system in the region and championed by mega-agencies like the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Understanding of pastoralist livelihoods was largely confined to a niche group of international and local experts who had a sophisticated knowledge of pastoralist economies, adaptation and coping strategies. There were also strong ideas about what constituted timely and constructive aid to pastoralists.⁶ Several pastoralist experts were lobbying for increased and improved humanitarian response to pastoralist communities throughout 2011–12. This knowledge was not common across the humanitarian sector and had no champion in a mega-agency or major donor that would lead large-scale innovative aid for pastoralist people. Much livelihood degradation could have been prevented by better and larger pastoralist programming.

2.3 Conflict and instability

Political control of the Somali state has been violently contested for decades. Political Islam emerged to play a major role in Somalia's conflict through the Islamic courts movement in the early 2000s and subsequently through Al-Shabaab and several other Islamist groups. Al-Shabaab is primarily a national movement, seeking to impose strict Sharia law and remove foreign influence. The movement has links to Al Qaeda,^b which has given the conflict a strong 'war-on-terror' dynamic since 2001. Support for the Somali Transitional Federal Government (2007–12) and Federal Government of Somalia (since 2012) in the conflict with Al-Shabaab has come from the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the multicountry African union force. Endorsed and resourced by the UN, AMISOM also receives significant support from the United States, United Kingdom and European Union. These donors also invest considerable bilateral resources in attempts to limit Al-Shabaab.

Throughout the crisis, and the critical years beforehand, AMISOM and Al-Shabaab were in conflict. This made international aid organisations fearful of being militarily targeted by Al-Shabaab or prosecuted in the United States.⁷ Sanction strategies were pursued by both sides. Al-Shabaab took strong measures to limit the number of 'western' aid agencies entering their territory, regarding them as potential spies. Aid agencies withdrew from parts of Somalia because of security threats and being banned by Al-Shabaab. Sanctions were implemented by the United States Government's Office for Foreign Assets Control and the UN Security Council to stop Al-Shabaab gaining resources and increasing their political control. While an important element of counterterrorism activities and efforts to halt Al-Shabaab, the sanctions had a negative impact on food supply. The amount of food aid provided by the United States in 2011 was about one-tenth of that provided in 2009.

^a For an excellent distillation of evidence-based good practice in such emergencies, see Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, *Humanitarian action in drought-related emergencies*, lessons paper, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2011.

^b The Australian Government listed Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organisation on 22 August 2009 and 18 August 2012. The Government has noted the link between Al-Shabaab and Al Qaeda, as confirmed by both organisations in a public announcement on 9 February 2012, see: www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Al-Shabaab.aspx.

2.4 The need for humanitarian assistance

The crisis is rightly seen as a regional one, born of profound long-term livelihood vulnerability for millions of people and entrenched regional conflict. Conflicts within the region meant that an effective regional response was not possible and the need for humanitarian assistance was massive.

The level of humanitarian need was continually revised upwards as the crisis unfolded throughout 2011. The estimate grew to 13.3 million people in need of assistance across the region (Figure 1). Of the 4 million people in need of assistance in Somalia, 2.8 million were in the south. The epicentre of the crisis was the riverine areas of south-central Somalia, where the famine killed an estimated 257 500 people, about half of whom were under five years old.⁸

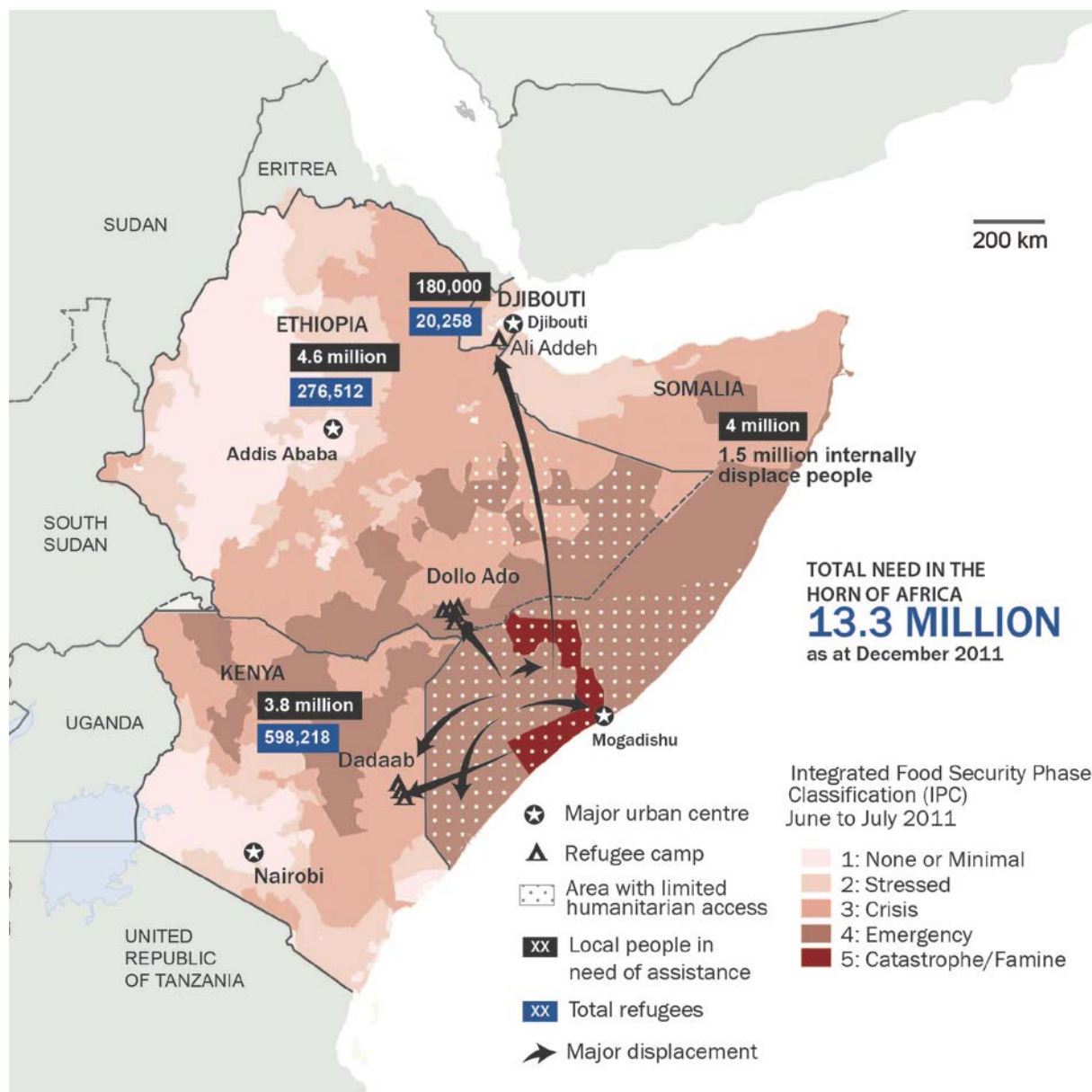
As the famine worsened, there was large-scale movement of people fleeing the worst-affected areas of Somalia. Some 167 000 people became displaced around Mogadishu. Many Somalis sought asylum in neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya. In Ethiopia, the crisis resulted in 4.6 million local people as well as 276 500 Somali refugees in need of assistance. In Kenya it was estimated that there were 3.8 million local people, plus 598 000 Somali refugees in need of assistance.

Food was clearly a priority area for humanitarian assistance but the severity of the crisis meant that affected people needed multiple forms of assistance. Water, shelter, protection, livelihood support and cash were all needed. Water shortages (for people and livestock) became extreme in the Somali region of Ethiopia, parts of northern Kenya and Somalia itself. As food prices rose and food aid access was blocked in Somalia, cash became an urgent priority (Box 1). Protection needs were high in Somalia, both for those in the worst-affected areas and for the large groups of displaced people, which were predominantly made up of women and children, who were forced to travel long distances in search of assistance.



New arrivals making their way to the refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya, August 2011. *Photo: Katie Drew, Save the Children*

Figure 1 Food insecurity and numbers of people in need of assistance in the Horn of Africa, 2011



Source: Adapted from OCHA/FEWS NET East Africa: Drought Snapshots from July and December, <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/horn-africa-humanitarian-snapshot-16-dec-2011>, 2011.

Note: The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a measure of how bad food insecurity is. It uses a set of standard tools to classify the severity of food insecurity into five phases. The phases are determined from a broad range of measures which includes food consumption, livelihoods changes, nutritional status, and mortality. Context-specific and other factors such as food availability, vulnerability and hazards are also taken into account. The IPCs shown on the map are for July 2011 when mortality rates were highest. The numbers of people who needed assistance and refugees are from December 2011.

2.5 The context of humanitarian operations in Somalia

The nature and quality of existing humanitarian capacity in the region played a critical role in how the crisis was managed. Capacity differed between the three countries concerned, with capacity being very limited in Somalia.^c In 2011, Somalia had no effective central government. What governance there was tended to be clan led, based on the limited reach of the Somalia Transitional Federal Government around Mogadishu or very strong control by Al-Shabaab and foreign jihadist fighters in their territories. Security concerns and inaccessibility made delivery of humanitarian assistance in Somalia extremely challenging.

As a result of security threats, the humanitarian response in the famine epicentre was mostly remotely managed. Humanitarian operations in Somalia rely on subcontracting implementation to local NGOs and business people, some of whom are former UN and NGO staff members. This informal network negotiates and delivers humanitarian aid on behalf of distant donors with little direct monitoring. Humanitarian operations in the crisis were led from Nairobi with occasional visits to meet implementing partners in Mogadishu, usually in the airport. This network is remarkable yet vulnerable. The situation was different in the Somali border regions of Puntland and Somaliland, where some direct management was possible.

Humanitarian operations in the worst-affected areas of Somalia were impaired by the inability of agencies to secure consistent access. In the lead up to and during the crisis, many humanitarian agencies, including the UN WFP, were expelled by Al-Shabaab from territories under its control. Eventually Al-Shabaab bans affected 22 aid agencies.

Aid agencies that did have access in Al-Shabaab-controlled areas were subjected to a system of 'regulation, taxation and surveillance'.⁹ In late 2009, Al-Shabaab imposed 11 conditions on aid agencies in south-central Somalia, 'including payments of registration and security fees, the removal of all logos from agency vehicles and a ban on female employees'. The traditional approach of providing the bulk of assistance as food, shelter materials and other in-kind aid is always problematic in conflict-affected and highly insecure countries such as Somalia. Conditions imposed by Al-Shabaab made operations extremely difficult. Al-Shabaab tried to control the delivery of aid and in some cases insisted that 'food distributions be carried out directly by Al-Shabaab officials or their proxies'.¹⁰ This led humanitarian agencies to explore innovative and more efficient ways of delivering aid.

One such approach was the use of cash transfers (see Box 1). Cash transfers had been used in Somalia for many years before the 2011 crisis as a way to circumvent access and security challenges. At the time of the crisis, the use of cash transfers was highly politicised and there were concerns about security and corruption risks, including fear of diversion to Al-Shabaab or foreign jihadist fighters. Even though these concerns made some agencies reluctant to use cash transfers, other agencies felt that the conditions in Somalia were appropriate for the use of cash transfers. The 2011 HoA crisis was, at the time, the largest ever delivery of cash transfers, with more than US\$100 million in cash provided to beneficiaries in Somalia.

Conclusion

- › The HoA crisis took place in an incredibly difficult political and operational context, and this should be considered when attempting to evaluate outcomes.

^c For an overview of regional humanitarian response, see H Slim, *IASC real-time evaluation of the humanitarian response to the Horn of Africa drought crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya—synthesis report*, UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva, 2012.

Box 1 Cash-transfer programming

Providing cash relief in emergencies has a long history. Cash programming is usually delivered either through direct cash grants or by giving vouchers. It can be provided with or without conditions.¹¹ Cash-transfer programming is increasingly used as an alternative to in-kind humanitarian aid (such as food, shelter, medicine, household items). A good practice review by the Overseas Development Institute points out that cash transfers are ‘simply an instrument that can be used—when appropriate—to meet particular objectives in particular contexts and sectors of response’.¹²

The advantages of cash transfers include:

- › They offer freedom of choice for beneficiaries as they can choose the commodities they want to consume.
- › They are generally less visible, have lower operational costs and are quicker to deploy than in-kind assistance.
- › If markets are already functioning, cash transfers can stimulate markets rather than inflate prices.¹³

The possible disadvantages of cash transfers include:

- › They may be used to pay off debts, rather than purchase commodities.
- › Inflation of prices may occur when supply of food and items in markets is low. In these circumstances, food aid is more appropriate than cash.
- › The implementation may take some time as aid agencies need to set up the delivery process if it is not already in place before a disaster.
- › Delivery mechanisms require proof of identity to receive cash, which many poor and vulnerable people may not have or be able to obtain.

In humanitarian situations, cash transfers are usually unconditional and are typically used by beneficiaries to address food security and nutrition issues.¹⁴ The proven success of cash transfers in some contexts has led United Nations (UN) agencies to expand their use of cash transfers and vouchers. In 2010, the UN World Food Programme targeted 4.2 million beneficiaries with 35 programs valued at \$140 million. Other UN agencies that had significant experience in the use of cash transfers at the time of the crisis included the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children’s Fund, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The challenge for UN agencies, non-government organisations, donors and governments is to determine when cash transfers are the most effective form of assistance.

3 The Australian response

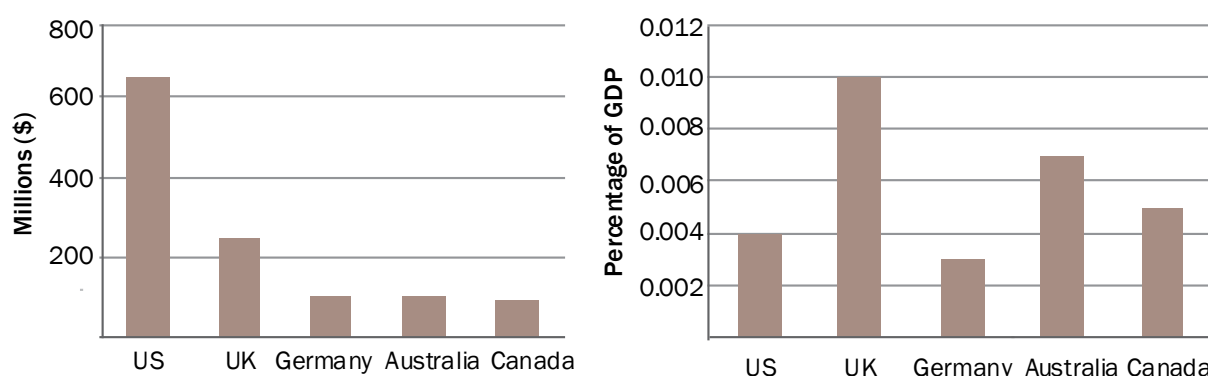
Key questions

- › Was the scale of Australia’s response appropriate?
- › What were the triggers for the crisis and were they appropriate?
- › What were the contextual and other constraints, and were these dealt with effectively?
- › What were the strategic priorities and were they appropriate?
- › Was the response to the crisis timely?
- › Did the breakdown of Australian assistance to countries and sectors align with strategic priorities?

3.1 Scale of funding

Australia contributed a total of \$112 million to the Horn of Africa (HoA) crisis in 2011, which put Australia in the top five country donors, both in absolute terms and relative to gross domestic product (Figure 2). Australia does not have strong historic links to the HoA, nor is East Africa a region of primary geopolitical and commercial interests. It is to the credit of Australia that it responded to the HoA crisis—and Somalia in particular—at a level in keeping with the magnitude of the crisis, one of the worst this century has seen.

Figure 2 Financial allocations to the HoA crisis made by country donors in 2011 in actual amounts (left) and as a percentage of gross domestic product (right)



Conclusion

- › Australia’s response was in keeping with the scale of needs in the crisis.

3.2 Triggers and constraints

The failure of the international humanitarian community to take early action in response to the crisis in the HoA is well documented in academic and policy literature.¹⁵ When the United Nations (UN) declared famine in Somalia in July 2011, the crisis was already severe.¹⁶ Many people died before funding was significantly increased in response to the declaration, with implementation of large-scale relief programs coming even later.

Australia, like the vast majority of donors, responded to scale when famine was declared in Somalia in July. Nevertheless, documentation and interviews showed that the Nairobi Post and the Africa Section in Canberra identified early in 2011 that the situation was deteriorating and tried, with some success, to secure funding. In March 2011, \$3 million was granted to the United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund for Somalia (CHF), run by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Other grants made in the run-up to the declaration of famine are listed in Table 4. A question for this evaluation is whether Australia should have made major funding commitments before the declaration of famine.

The lateness of the international response is seen by many as an unacceptable failure of major donors and the UN, given they had clear and compelling evidence of how bad things were at the beginning of 2011.¹⁷ As a result of Somalia's long civil war and its history of food insecurity, the international humanitarian system has developed a sophisticated monitoring and early warning system for famine. The two key components of this system are the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), backed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) hosted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for Somalia. These monitor meteorological data, crop production, nutritional status, movement of people due to conflict or hunger, and other pertinent indicators.

Table 4 Grants made in advance of the famine declaration

Agency	Amount	Purpose	Date provided
Kenya			
United Nations (UN) World Food Programme	\$4 000 000	To improve food security in the semi-arid areas of Kenya, and provide assistance to Somali and Sudanese refugees	May 2011
UN World Food Programme	\$1 000 000	To improve food security in the semi-arid areas of Kenya, and provide assistance to Somali and Sudanese refugees	July 2011
Somalia			
UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	\$3 000 000	To support high-priority humanitarian activities in Somalia	March 2011
Save the Children	\$1 163 000	To develop and implement disaster risk-reduction activities in the drought-stricken region of Hiran in south-central Somalia, and to extend disaster risk reduction work with secondary school children and communities in Kenya	June 2011

By early 2011, reports being produced by both FEWS NET and FSNAU warned of an impending crisis in Somalia.^a Although these reports are technical and deal in probabilities rather than certainties, they made it clear that food shortages were severe. These warnings were recognised but not acted on for a number of reasons. Somalia had been 'bad' before and never tipped over into famine. Rains were seldom consistent. Warnings were often dire yet somehow ordinary Somali people have survived from year to year. The poor harvest towards the end of 2010 was expected to have been partly mitigated by the good one earlier in the year and Somalia's extensive remittances. Additionally, agencies may have developed a habit of betting on the next rains.¹⁸ Donors were also wary of significant investment, since without a declaration of famine, it is hard to justify the prioritisation of scarce resources to one crisis over another.

However, relying on a declaration of famine or pressure from the media before acting leads to unnecessary death and suffering. For famine to be declared, many people have already died and many others would be about to die. It is also inefficient in terms of resources. Once famine is declared, it takes time to mobilise resources and then implement humanitarian programs.¹⁹ It costs a lot more to feed people on the edge of starvation than it does to pre-empt it.²⁰ There needs to be a solution to this challenge. It also needs to be a collective solution to ensure that donors like Australia invest in it.

In hindsight it is clear that the critical issue in the worsening famine was the war and the sanctions strategies. International counterterrorism policies and Al-Shabaab restrictions and expulsions dramatically reduced humanitarian resources and reach. These sanctions, along with the remoteness of the operation in Somalia and its very high dependency on interpersonal trust, shaped a culture of uncertainty that seriously compromised the possibility of taking action in 2010 and early 2011.

These limitations do not excuse the lack of early action, as the interagency evaluation makes clear.²¹ However, it did mean that donors like Australia that did not have a long history in the region looked to donors that had been in the region longer and had greater resources to provide some of this analysis. The partial failure of the United Kingdom²² and the United States of America to act early, for instance, meant it was less likely that Australia, and donors like Australia, would act early.²³

The Australian aid program had an additional set of constraints as they were in the early stages of establishing a regional East Africa office. This meant that although they had an experienced and capable head of office, only about a quarter of the 20 or so staff they intended to recruit was in place. The Australian High Commission was also being expanded to accommodate the growth plan, meaning that the Australian aid program was in temporary accommodation, making official communication and access to corporate documentation difficult.

Conclusions

- › Australia, like other donors, did not respond at scale in time for many of those who died during the famine.
- › The Australian aid program was constrained in its ability to respond due to limited information, being new to the region, and being in scale-up mode.
- › The Australian aid program recognised there was an impending crisis in Somalia early and secured some funding before famine was declared.

^a The September 2010 'special brief' issue of the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit bulletin makes it abundantly clear there is a crisis in south-central Somalia. Subsequent issues document the worsening situation.

- › In future responses to slow-onset crises, signals other than the declaration of famine need to be identified and prioritised to facilitate early action.

3.3 Strategic approach

The Australian aid program's strategy for this crisis was never formally written down. The evolving nature of the funding envelope and the fast pace of events in the early days of the response made developing a strategy challenging. A formal written strategy would have helped the team better articulate their need for support. A clear strategy would also have helped to shift thinking from a reactive to a proactive mind-set—one that was trying to effect and monitor specific outcomes. Nevertheless, a number of sound key strategic decisions were made:

- › **Geographic focus:** A key decision was to focus funding on Somalia despite the risks and inherent difficulties. This was appropriate because the epicentre of the crisis, and therefore the needs for humanitarian assistance, were greatest there. In recognition of the massive displacement of people, funding was also provided to support Somali refugees in Kenya and in Ethiopia. The geographic areas where non-government organisations (NGOs) provided assistance were primarily determined by their existing operations and were not strongly influenced by the Australian aid program.
- › **Sectoral focus:** In funding UN agencies, a limited number of sectors—food assistance and support for displaced people—were prioritised. The intention behind these decisions was clear and appropriate: to provide the assistance needed most urgently to stop people dying. The Australian aid program had little influence on the sectors where NGOs provided assistance.
- › **Partner focus:** The overall strategy was to limit funding to a small number of agencies, including some that had already navigated access constraints. A key decision was to focus funding on UN agencies with most funding going to the World Food Programme (WFP) (see Section 4.6). In hindsight, it may have been better to allocate proportionally more funding to UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which were already fully operational and able to access critical areas in Somalia. More funding should have been directed to partners that were using, or were willing to increase their use of, cash transfers.
- › **Flexible funding:** The Australian aid program worked with partners to identify broad objectives, but gave them the flexibility to decide what they funded within sectors and modalities. Ensuring flexibility for partners in a complex changing environment with lots of donor demands was an important well-founded decision. This was also done to recognise that the aid program had limited capacity to determine the most appropriate earmarking and that this was best done by implementing partners.
- › **Management:** Nairobi Post worked to make the overall system deliver results, which was a relevant and appropriate strategy. It saw them looking at the big picture rather than trying to micromanage every grant. Realistically, it was also the only strategy available given the human resource levels.

The strategy was carried out in three main ways in Somalia. The Australian aid program closely supported the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA, promoted and led donor coordination, and engaged robustly with WFP to ensure it delivered where they were operational.

Management of assistance in Ethiopia and Kenya was more hands off. The light touch in Ethiopia and Kenya raises the question as to whether Australia should have responded at all in these countries, especially Ethiopia. Ethiopia certainly deserved assistance—the need was real and the response well executed (in the main)—but the Australian aid program was already stretched managing its response

in Somalia. In the future, it may be sensible to focus more geographically, with a potentially clearer impact.

Conclusions

- › There was no formal written strategy to guide the response or articulate priorities.
- › The strategic decision to focus the bulk of funding on food assistance and Somalia was appropriate given the famine was most acute in Somalia.
- › Supporting the refugee response, providing flexible funding and investing effort in making the response work overall were appropriate strategic decisions.
- › In hindsight, proportionally more funding should have been directed to agencies with access to worst-affected areas and agencies that used cash transfers as a form of assistance.

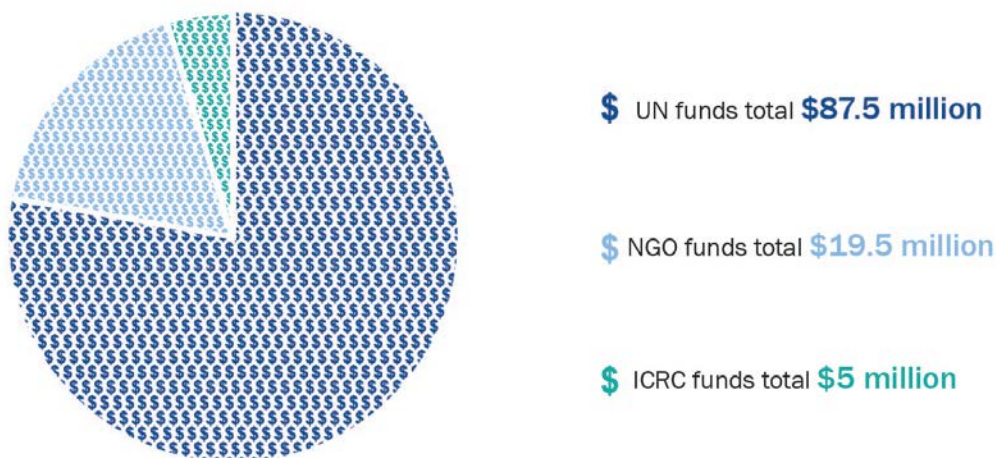


Internally displaced people in the Sigale Camp, Mogadishu, Somalia. *Photo: Graham Mathieson, Save the Children*

3.4 Funding by partner

In 2011, the bulk of Australian assistance, about 80 per cent, went to UN agencies with a heavy focus on WFP (Figure 3, Table 5). The focus on WFP indicates that the Australian Government prioritised strong returns in the reduction of malnutrition and the eradication of famine. Further support for food security came from allocations to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to FAO. The prioritisation of refugee support was evidenced by the allocations to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The UN Department for Safety and Security was also funded.

Figure 3 Australian financial assistance by type of agency



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

Note: NGO funding includes all funding allocated through the Dollar for Dollar Initiative as well as through other means. Some of the organisations funded through the Dollar for Dollar Initiative directed funding to UN agencies. Some of the funding provided to UN agencies was used to support other organisations.

Funding was also given to the United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF)—a pool of emergency funding administered by OCHA. In Somalia, the CHF funded international and local (Somali) NGOs, which provided the majority of the implementing capacity. This was one of the few sources of funding for Somali NGOs beyond partnering with UN agencies or international NGOs.

The ICRC was allocated about 5 per cent of the total budget. This funding rightly recognised ICRC’s frontline responsibility within the Red Cross/Crescent movement for delivering assistance in conflict-affected areas.

Most of the remaining funding (about 15 per cent) was allocated to NGOs and the Australian Red Cross Society through two separate mechanisms: the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) and the Dollar for Dollar Initiative (Table 5). In this diversification, Australia sought added value beyond UN programming. These investments also demonstrate a long-term interest in sustaining the reach and credibility of Australian NGOs.

The HPA is an agreement between the Australian aid program and a preselected group of six Australian NGOs with significant global reach and capacity. The Dollar for Dollar Initiative was developed through discussions between Australian NGOs and the Australian aid program. In this initiative, the Australian Government matched the funds donated by the public to 19 NGOs and the Australian Red Cross Society over a specified period. The initiative aimed to raise funds for the crisis and to build public support.

Conclusions

- › Australian funding was heavily focused on UN agencies (about 80 per cent), particularly WFP, which received about half the total funds. Other UN agencies funded included CHF, FAO, UNICEF and UNHCR.
- › Funds were also allocated to ICRC (5 per cent) and NGOs (15 per cent).

Table 5 Financial allocations to partners, 2011

Agency	HPA funding (\$)	Dollar for Dollar Initiative funding (\$)	Total (\$)
UN World Food Programme			57 000 000
UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)			15 000 000
UN Common Humanitarian Fund			3 000 000
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)			10 000 000
UN Food and Agriculture Organization			2 000 000
International Committee of the Red Cross			5 000 000
Australian Red Cross Society		636 624	636 624
Save the Children Australia	1 500 000	1 500 859	4 163 859
World Vision Australia	455 000	1 715 338	2 170 338
Oxfam Australia	800 000	1 143 770	1 943 770
Caritas Australia	455 000	1 386 107	1 841 107
CARE Australia	990 000	487 915	1 477 915
Adventist Development and Relief Agency		1 130 984	1 130 984
PLAN Australia	800 000	258 750	1 058 750
Australian Committee for UNICEF		1 046 872	1 046 872
UN Department for Safety and Security			500 000
Australian Lutheran World Service		810 875	810 875
Australia for UNHCR		704 248	704 248
Tear Australia		670 551	670 551
Archbishop of Sydney's Overseas Relief and Aid Fund		520 341	520 341
ChildFund Australia		417 490	417 490
CBM Australia		353 989	353 989
National Council of Churches Australia Ltd		229 090	229 090
Baptist World Aid Australia		222 539	222 539
Uniting Church Overseas Aid (Uniting World)		171 333	171 333
Anglican Board of Mission Australia		91 333	91 333
Anglicord		84 183	84 183
Total	5 000 000	13 583 191	112 246 191

HPA = Humanitarian Partnership Agreement; UN = United Nations

3.5 Timeliness of funding for United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross

Following the declaration of famine, Australia was one of the first donors to commit funding. A series of announcements of funding packages were made:

- › \$8 million on 13 July 2011: this includes grants made before the declaration (Table 4) and an additional \$2 million for FAO
- › \$25 million on 20 July 2011 (coinciding with the famine declaration): \$15 million for the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) regionally, \$10 million for WFP Ethiopia
- › \$42 million on 25 July 2011 (coinciding with the Foreign Minister's trip to Somalia): for WFP with \$33 million for Somalia and \$9 million for Kenya (with \$22 million of this coming from an annual contribution to WFP centrally, which was allocated by WFP themselves)
- › \$15.5 million in August and September 2011: \$10 million for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), \$5 million for the ICRC and \$0.5 million for the UN Department for Safety and Security.

This timing was similar to other, much bigger donors in the region such as the United Kingdom.²⁴

Several agencies interviewed stated that Australia was among the fastest to pay, with funds arriving within two weeks of pledges being made.²⁵ This is faster than the European Community Humanitarian Office and CHF, which took 92 and 107 days, respectively, on average to disburse their allocations.²⁶

Conclusions

- › After the declaration of famine, Australia responded quickly and was among the first donors to commit significant levels of funding.
- › Once funds were committed, Australia disbursed funding quickly.

3.6 Timeliness of funding for non-government organisations

Funds were allocated to Australian NGOs through the HPA and Dollar for Dollar Initiative. The HPA was designed as a mechanism to facilitate speedy disbursement of funds in response to rapid-onset crises. When a disaster strikes, an envelope of funding is allocated, and the NGOs included in the agreement rapidly meet, decide who is best placed to respond and submit a proposal. The agreement specifies that funds are to be approved within 48–72 hours and released within seven days. At the time of the HoA crisis, the HPA had only recently been established. The first activation of the HPA was an allocation of \$5 million to the HoA crisis on 20 July. This allocation was split between the agencies according to internal agreement.

The Dollar for Dollar Initiative began in November 2011 and raised \$13.5 million from the public, which was matched by the same amount by the Australian Government. Funds from this initiative went to HPA agencies and many other NGOs. The timing of the appeal meant that much of the funding went to 'early recovery' work.

Conclusions

- › Funding of NGOs through the HPA was efficient and timely.
- › Funding from the Dollar for Dollar Initiative was not available to NGOs until many months after the declaration of famine.

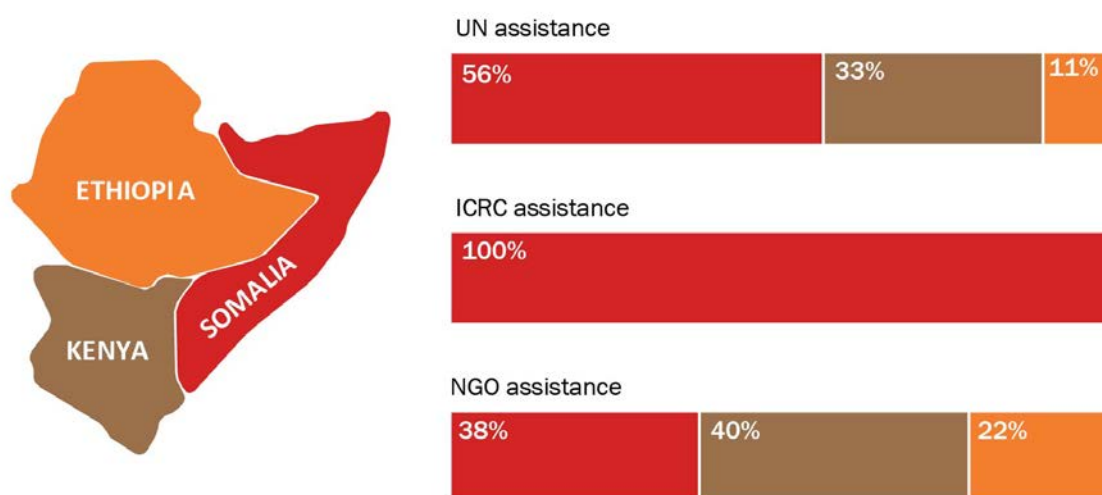
3.7 Country allocations

Somalia received the bulk of Australian assistance. Of total Australian support for the crisis, some \$61 million went to Somalia, with lesser amounts of \$14 million going to Ethiopia and \$37 million to Kenya including the \$15 million regional refugee contribution provided to UNHCR (as it all went to Dadaab). Funding to UN agencies followed this pattern (Figure 4). All funding to ICRC was used for Somalia. In contrast, proportionally more funding to NGOs was used in in both Kenya and Ethiopia.

Conclusions

- > Australian assistance and allocations to UN agencies were appropriately concentrated on Somalia.
- > Funding to NGOs was used in all three countries.

Figure 4 Australian financial assistance, by type of agency and country



ICRC= International Red Crescent Society; NGO = non-government organisation; UN = United Nations

3.8 Funding by sector and form of assistance

Australian assistance was focused on food and nutrition (60 per cent) and refugee support (12 per cent) as intended, but funding also went to many other sectors (Figure 5). Other sectors that were well funded included livelihoods, and water, sanitation and hygiene. Smaller amounts of funding were used for education, health, shelter and non-food items, and protection.

The sectors and type of assistance funded by UN and ICRC investments follow this general pattern, while NGO support was somewhat different (Figure 5). Proportionately, significantly less NGO funding was used for food (12 per cent) and displaced people, and much more for water, sanitation and hygiene (33 per cent), and livelihoods (24 per cent). Many of the sectors, including health and education, which received a low level of support from UN agencies, received proportionately more funding from NGOs funded by the Dollar for Dollar Initiative. Consequently, the sectoral spread of Australian assistance stems from NGO funding.

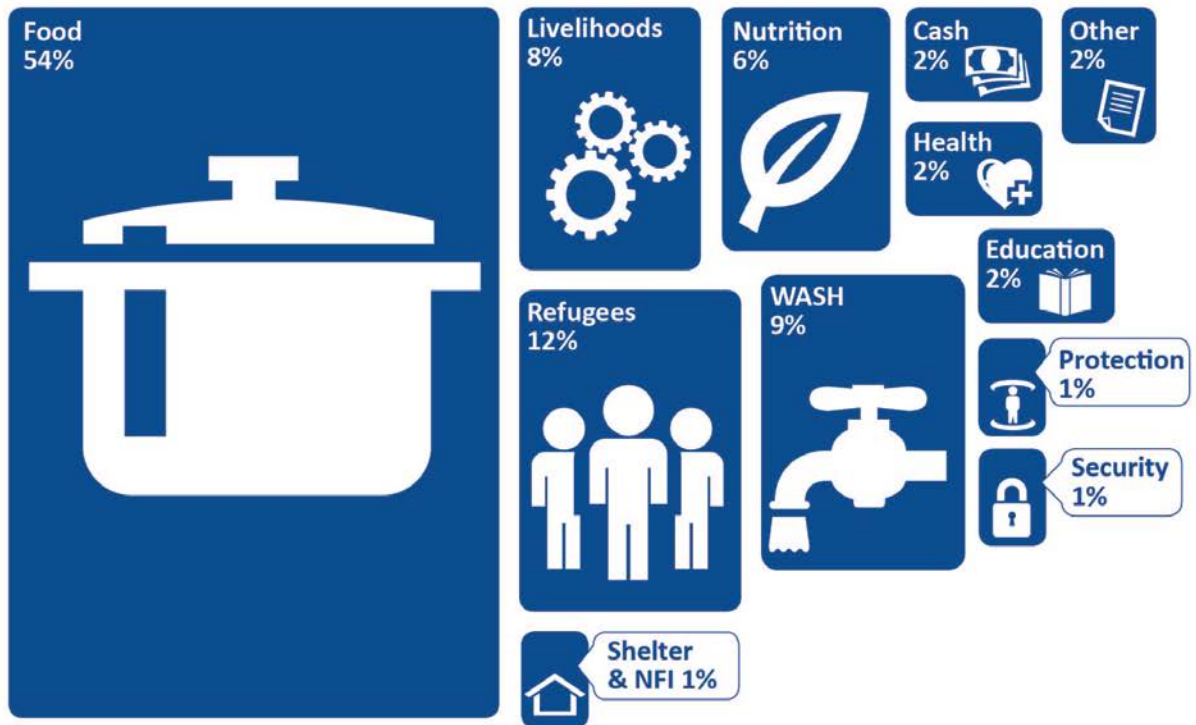
While Australia funded some cash transfer programs, they were only about 2 per cent of the overall budget. These were funded through grants to UNICEF, the OCHA-managed CHF, the HPA and later through the Dollar for Dollar Initiative. In comparison with UN agencies, NGOs allocated proportionally more funding to cash transfers. Notably, about 13 per cent of the HPA allocation was used for cash transfers.

Conclusions

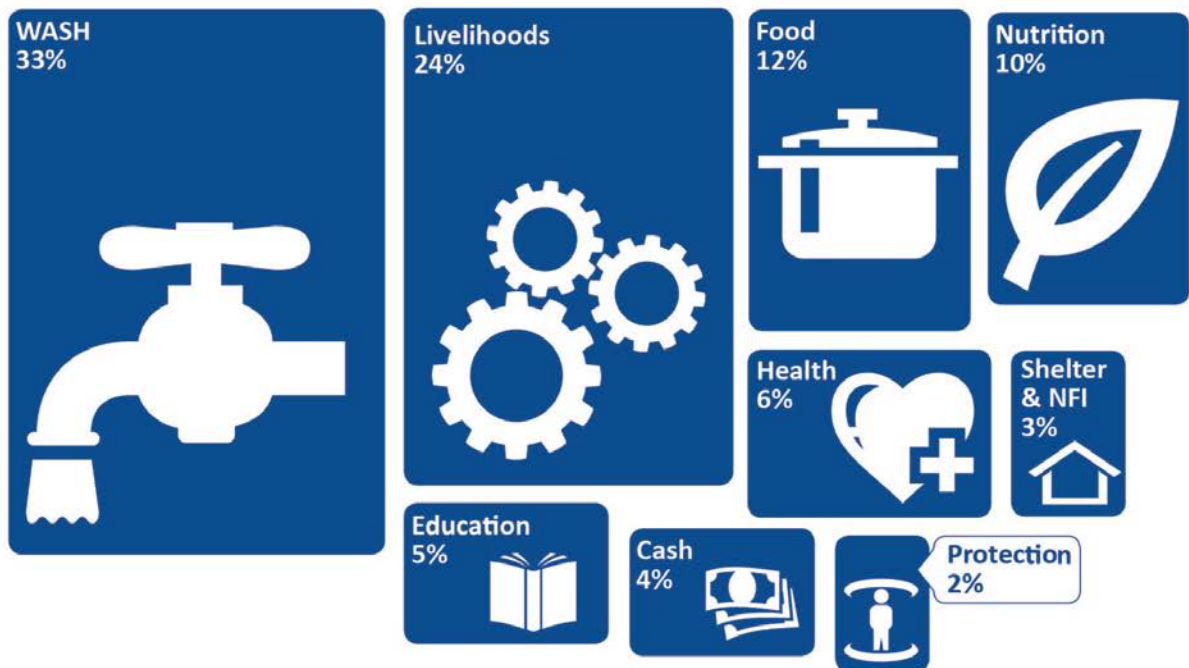
- › Australian assistance and allocations to UN agencies and ICRC were mostly focused on food and nutrition, and refugees, with less funding allocated to other sectors.
- › Most funding allocated to NGOs were allocated to water, sanitation and hygiene, and livelihoods.
- › Funding to NGOs increased the spread of funds across sectors.
- › Only a small proportion of funding was used for cash transfers.

Figure 5 Funding allocations to sectors and forms of assistance

All partners



Partners funded through the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement and the Dollar for Dollar Initiative



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

4 Delivery of Australian assistance

Key questions

- › Were there any areas in which Australia showed leadership?
- › To what extent did the Australian aid program influence partner and donor responses to the crisis?
- › How was Australian assistance coordinated with the international effort?
- › Were the mechanisms used to fund implementing partners efficient?
- › How did corporate systems perform?
- › What elements and channels of programming were most effective?

4.1 Leadership and advocacy

The most significant influencing work that Australia was involved in during the Horn of Africa (HoA) response was its political advocacy with other donors and its push to change their cautious approach. Australia's foreign minister visited Somalia with the executive director of the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) in late July, to publicise the urgency and severity of the crisis. This marked a moment of genuine international leadership by Australia. Not only did Australia call for others to fund generously and take greater risks in Somalia, it led by example—releasing funds early and focusing assistance on Somalia. Following this and other appeals (together with key allies such as the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development), donor 'caution' was relaxed and more aid flowed into famine-stricken areas.

During the crisis, the Australian aid program in Nairobi worked with UN agencies and other donors to have influence in the areas that affected how the 'system' could work most effectively. Stakeholder interviews showed clearly that Australian leadership in this area was appreciated.^a Australia leveraged its investment in WFP, making it move faster than it might have done otherwise. A useful partnership formed between the Post and colleagues in the Rome office whereby a rapid exchange of information allowed for sensible advocacy to help WFP improve its response (for instance, making sure the deployment of emergency staff was speeded up). Australia also pushed WFP and the food cluster for better reporting that gave actual rather than planned beneficiary numbers. Such advocacy work is often essential in emergency response to ensure the largest multilateral agencies are performing. The Australian aid program needs to ensure that staffing levels and expertise are sufficient to facilitate such work.

^a Several donor agencies interviewed referred to Australian leadership on donor coordination; the United Nations was appreciative of the critical but constructive engagement.

Conclusions

- › Australia advocated for action and led by example through releasing funding early and taking some bold decisions.
- › Active engagement with multilateral agencies by donors is essential to guarantee performance.

4.2 Coordination

Coordination of the international response was viewed as poor in the HoA crisis, possibly because to work in Somalia, individual agencies needed to negotiate with Al-Shabaab and could not share sensitive information.²⁷ Coordination ‘hubs’ established inside Somalia suffered staffing problems and found they could not easily organise meetings because security issues made it difficult for people to attend. The real-time evaluation from the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) found that there was a lack of strategic leadership from the key coordinating bodies, which resulted in no overall response strategy.²⁸ The IASC evaluation saw coordination as mostly occurring through the cluster system^b centred in Nairobi. This produced multiple substrategies at the individual cluster level. The cluster system had limited non-government organisation (NGO) participation, prompting one NGO consulted in this evaluation to say ‘clusters have been a disaster here and should be scrapped’.²⁹ Parallel meetings were set up adjacent to the cluster system resulting in an overall crowding of the system.³⁰ Other factors contributing to dysfunctional coordination were the access constraints in Somalia and the consequent relocation of the majority of the response management to Nairobi, about a thousand kilometres away from the famine epicentre. The breakdown of coordinated action meant that there was not a common operational picture of needs or who was doing what.

In Nairobi, the Australian aid program took the view that coordination was critical, and looked to support the UN Humanitarian Coordinator’s efforts to direct the overall operation.^c They tried to ensure Australia’s partners, such as WFP, engaged properly in coordination activities, as well as pressing other donors to do so. A good example of the former was the Australian aid program lobbying WFP to make the food cluster active and effective. In terms of donor coordination, Australia took on the leadership of the informal donor coordination group in early 2012. Implementing partners and other donors considered that Australia had effectively improved coordination and played a valuable ‘brokering role’ between large donors, the UN system and smaller donors.

Conclusions

- › In a complex conflict-affected environment, coordination is difficult. Despite this, the Australian aid program achieved some success in improving coordination and played a lead role in the coordination of food security among donors.

4.3 Staffing levels and support

The Australian response was characterised by the incredible dedication of aid program staff. The Africa program was tiny but growing fast when the crisis hit. In Nairobi, most staff members were new.

^b The ‘cluster’ system essentially arranges coordination by technical groups with a designated United Nations (UN) agency in charge. So the World Food Programme coordinates food, United Nations Children’s Fund water, World Health Organization health and so on. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the humanitarian coordinator are responsible for bringing these various groupings together to provide overall coordination.

^c The humanitarian coordinator is the most senior UN official in charge of the response on the ground. UN OCHA supports this position by providing a coordinating office.

In Canberra, staff already had a large and challenging portfolio. In these circumstances, Australia’s fast, effective and well-regarded response is a testament to the hard work of those involved.

High volumes of aid handled by a small and relatively new team inevitably created challenges. There was little institutional experience in African famine and drought to call on. Neither was there a system in place to deploy extra support—especially humanitarian expertise—for complex conflict-related slow-onset crises. This affected the team’s ability to monitor programs, adapt interventions and focus the portfolio. This is a key lesson for the Australian aid program.

This evaluation found that the staffing levels deployed to support the response were inadequate. Staffing levels were not appropriately increased in Canberra or in Nairobi, despite a huge increase in workloads. Comparative staffing numbers for other humanitarian responses can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6 Staffing levels for major Australian humanitarian operations

	HoA famine	Pakistan floods (2010)	Cyclone Evan—Samoa
Funding	\$112 million (in 2011)	\$75 million	\$9 million
Number of grants	44	29	3
Staff at Post	4	11	10
Dedicated staff at Post	none	2–4	5
Additional staff at desk	2	none	1 full time (1 week), 3 part time (1 week)
Crisis centre	Not activated	Activated: 20 staff initially, but then 4–5 at any one time for 6 weeks	Activated: up to 10 staff initially, but then 3–4 officers at any one time for 4 weeks
RRT officers	2	1 to assist in overall response	3
Other support	HER support for HPA and Dollar for Dollar Initiative	4 taskforce officers (4 weeks)	5 HER staff full time (1 week)

HER = Humanitarian Emergency Response Section; HoA = Horn of Africa; RRT = rapid response team

Despite the financial commitment to the HoA crisis being much greater than responses to the Pakistan flood in 2010 and to Cyclone Evan in Samoa, the HoA received the smallest amount of staff support (Table 6). Understaffing appears to be partly due to the designation of the crisis as ‘slow onset’ and therefore managed by the geographical desk. The Australian aid program has developed a well-functioning system, with a number of key tools for emergency responses to rapid-onset crises. Once an emergency is declared, a ‘crisis room’ system operates by putting a new team in place to manage it day to day, under the supervision of the Humanitarian Emergency Response Section. This can call on the rapid response team (RRT)—a group of staff across the organisation trained in emergency response and support roles. In the HoA crisis, the crisis centre was not activated and only two RRT members were deployed. Support from the Humanitarian Emergency Response Section was limited to use of the HPA mechanism, and the designing and running of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative.

The fact that money was being exclusively channelled to partner agencies seems to have been another reason why staffing levels were not increased. Some staff who worked on the response

expressed the view that another factor may have been that staff with the required humanitarian expertise were not available within the wider organisation.

This evaluation has identified a number of issues that are broadly applicable in responses to slow-onset crises.

- › **Partner-mediated responses require additional human resources:** The assumption that because there is no direct response the workload is less is not the case. In fact, the oversight required of partners can be just as time consuming and the briefing, high-profile visits, policy work, and responses to public and political interest remain the same for both types of emergencies.
- › **Some of the skill sets needed for complex humanitarian emergencies are different to those for 'natural' disasters:** Complex humanitarian emergencies often demand deep knowledge of how to work in conflict, and the international architecture deployed in such situations. There is a need for more generic 'humanitarian adviser' personnel, who are familiar with the architecture of the humanitarian system and the niche of the different responding agencies. These skills are important for help in strategy setting and for steering the response once resources have been committed.
- › **The deployment times are longer in slow-onset crises:** Typically, there is a need for heightened staffing levels for at least six months, meaning RRT deployments might be less useful for this type of scale-up as the removal of staff from their day jobs for this long is disruptive. The organisation may need to expand its cadre of humanitarian staff (who will be available for response in their regions, as well as deployable). Moreover, ways to scale up staffing rapidly, including through consultancy type arrangements, need to be found.
- › **The intense period for the first six weeks is very similar to rapid onset:** In this period, the types of skills the RRT has to offer are as useful as in rapid-onset contexts—briefing, disbursal, strategy setting, contracting and so on.
- › **The management should stay with the desk, but the largest responses should have corporate oversight:** There is a need to recognise that in the largest emergencies there should be a 'corporate response'—some sort of trigger that means senior management endorse the correct resources and tap into the skills of the humanitarian branch properly. A simple activation procedure—such as a meeting with some standard agenda items—would suffice.
- › **Working on humanitarian crises stresses staff through both workloads and exposure to traumatic suffering:** The Australian aid program should recognise this as a matter of policy and make sure procedures are in place to support staff properly.

Conclusions

- › There were few, if any, extra staff deployed to help with the HoA response, either in Canberra or in Nairobi, despite it being the largest ever response by the program in financial volume. Heavy workloads, as well as witnessing the devastating effects of the famine, led to extremely high pressure and stress on staff.
- › The fact it was a slow-onset crisis meant that rapid-onset models did not apply. In the future, a system needs to be put in place to resource such responses rapidly and properly.

4.4 Flexibility of funding

Australia worked with partners to identify broad goals but gave partners scope to adapt programs to specific or evolving circumstances. Interviews found that Australia's flexibility as a donor was

appreciated. Flexible funding is important, as it allows those closest to the work to make decisions on where the greatest need lies and how needs can be addressed most effectively.

Conclusion

- › Australia was noted for being a flexible donor and should continue to provide flexible funding to partners.

4.5 Monitoring partner performance

This evaluation found a lack of capacity within the aid program during the HoA response to monitor the performance of partners. The lack of capacity was compounded by the difficulty of obtaining good data in a conflict zone and the general lack of transparency within the sector. As a result of limited staffing, resources were quite sensibly focused on monitoring the largest grants, and in particular on WFP. The effective work that the Australian aid program did in pushing WFP for greater transparency (about lack of access), and pushing for coordination mechanisms such as the food security cluster to be established, shows how donors are often obliged to ‘actively manage’ their funding portfolios. The greater the financial commitment and the more complex the situation, the more active management is needed. A conclusion of this evaluation is that during crises Australia needs to deploy routinely more capacity to engage with partners and monitor their operations.

The level of detail of information needed to evaluate retrospectively the performance of implementing partners is not available. Agencies, particularly UN agencies, did not report in any detail on what was achieved as a result of flexible funding. Nairobi Post accepted that there was a direct trade-off between flexibility and reporting on Australia-specific results. As a result, by the end of the crisis, knowledge of the impact of Australian funding was limited.

An illustrative example of this issue is provided by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) who were given \$15 million for a ‘regional refugee response’. UNHCR did not report on this expenditure beyond its standard reporting (annual country reports, global reports), as is the agreement. When more information was requested for this evaluation, the agency confirmed that all of the funds had been allocated to the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, but what the funds had been spent on could not be identified. The evaluators were told that if Australia had specified in advance where funding should be spent a detailed expenditure report would have been provided, but because funding was given flexibly funds had not been tracked.

Beyond standard reporting, little additional information about what was delivered and what was achieved was available to this evaluation or forthcoming on request. Some UN agencies stated that requests for information were not met as they created extra work and were not in the original agreement. NGOs routinely provide more information about their work, both ahead of time and retrospectively, than the UN agencies. Asking UN agencies to provide this level of information would help Australia to better understand who is routinely performing.

Flexible funding need not require a trade-off with reporting. Based on the HoA experience, there are some key principles that will help Australia’s aid be flexible without reducing the usefulness of reporting:

- › Agencies do not need to be overly prescriptive at the proposal stage. Proposals can be solicited on the basis of broad strategic fit, with a commitment to achieve high-level outcomes.
- › Reporting needs can be specified in some detail in agency level granting agreements. All agencies have detailed internal accounting systems; donor funds are allocated codes and reports can be

generated against this to show precise expenditure on all lines. This type of financial accounting should be required as routine.

- › Australian aid can specify reporting on outputs or outcomes in its agreements. Reporting requirements can be based on what is practical and how the information will be used.

Standards and policies requiring sex disaggregation of beneficiary numbers also continue to be ignored or deemed infeasible by many agencies. While this is usually done at project level, numbers are then aggregated for higher-level reporting. This precludes monitoring and reporting on the most basic level of equity, comparing the value of relief items distributed to men and boys with the value of relief items distributed to women and girls.

As the humanitarian work of the Australian aid program has grown in complexity, scale and ambition, the organisation has begun to build humanitarian expertise. Recently, a humanitarian adviser has been appointed in Canberra and there are also a growing, but still insufficient, number of humanitarian professionals in Posts. A mechanism to redeploy these types of advisers rapidly, or to be able to bring in others at short notice, would give the organisation access to robust monitoring capacity, in turn allowing for better informed decision-making and follow-up.

Conclusions

- › Efforts to monitor partner performance during the crisis focused largely on WFP.
- › An inadequate deployment of staff to work on the crisis meant that the Australian aid program was not able to monitor its portfolio in detail.
- › NGOs typically reported in more detail than UN agencies.
- › A number of UN agencies receiving significant levels of funding did not provide adequate information on outcomes, and did not disaggregate data by sex and age.
- › Flexibility has become conflated with a lack of scrutiny, but this should not be the case. Future agreements with UN agencies should continue to provide funds flexibly but also require greater specificity in reporting and accountability.

4.6 Choice of implementing partners

The Australian aid program's strategic intent was sound but the operational reality in the HoA complicated humanitarian responses. Al-Shabaab controlled the worst-affected areas, where they banned many aid groups and made delivery dangerous and difficult for the rest. The complex contextual constraints and lack of detailed reporting by some partners make it difficult to evaluate the choices about implementing partners.

Largely, Australia made good choices about which partners to fund. The level of WFP funding and the small numbers partners who used of cash-transfer programming (see Box 1) are the exceptions. The following covers the main funding decisions.

World Food Programme

The background to the decision to focus funding heavily on WFP is worth setting out to understand the constraints and opportunities that existed at the time.

At the time of the famine declaration, the international aid community was trying to find ways to get a general distribution of food going. Widespread free food distribution is an obvious thing to do in

famine. Increasing the general availability of food is also beneficial as it helps ensure that the special nutritional foods are used to treat clinically malnourished children as intended, as well as reducing the need to sell assets for food. WFP is the pre-eminent deliverer of emergency food globally. It is consistently rated as one of the best-performing humanitarian agencies, with a reputation for fast response and slick logistics. They scored highly in Australia's *Assessment of multilateral agencies* and in the United Kingdom equivalent, the *Multilateral assessment review*. WFP is one of the few agencies that can deliver food to millions of people rather than hundreds or thousands.

However, in July 2011, the capacity of WFP to instigate large-scale food distribution in the worst-affected areas of Somalia was limited. In the years leading up to the crisis, the combination of a UN monitoring report criticising WFP for inadequate scrutiny of Somali contractors³¹ and unacceptable operating restrictions enforced by Al-Shabaab meant WFP ceased operations in south-central Somalia. Many donors suspended financial support for WFP. An additional problem faced by WFP was being banned by Al-Shabaab in January 2010.³² As a result, when the crisis escalated, WFP had no access to Al-Shabaab-controlled areas and had not received substantial funding, meaning it had few resources should it gain access.³³

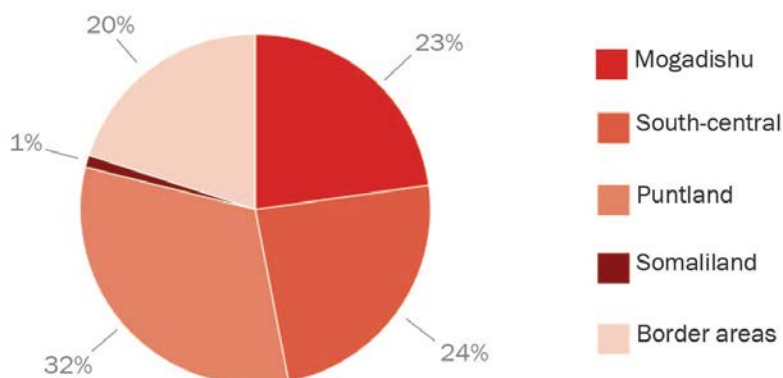
Although WFP was not operational in the most severely affected regions,³⁴ other agencies were not able to fill the gap because contingency plans for the absence of WFP had not been developed. Consequently, despite WFP's lack of access and funding for almost a year, the agency was still both perceived and promoting itself as the agency to undertake large-scale food distribution in Somalia. It was hoped that Al-Shabaab, faced with a catastrophe in their area and a change in policy from WFP, would enable WFP to commence large-scale food distribution in the worst-affected areas.

Al-Shabaab did not allow WFP access to south-central Somalia, preventing any impact it might have had in the epicentre of the famine at the peak of the crisis. WFP also took time to get going, starting from a very low base, having lost much of its capacity. It was September 2011 before WFP Somalia was able to adequately scale up operations, and even then only in the border areas and Mogadishu where there were large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As a result, only 24 per cent of funding of WFP in Somalia went to the south-central area (Figure 6). Consequently, by financing WFP in Somalia, Australia arguably did not fund the most immediate life-saving interventions. At the time, it was not possible to know that WFP would not have access, although it was possible to predict it would take time to scale-up.

At scale, WFP distributed food across significant areas in Somalia, principally in Mogadishu, Puntland and the border areas, which received large numbers of IDPs. Most WFP assistance was provided outside the worst-affected region. Intrinsically, there is nothing wrong with this, especially if others are providing assistance in other regions—it can be seen as a division of labour. But it was not the Australian aid program's original intention.

Throughout the crisis, WFP continued to operate on a food-delivery model despite reforms in headquarters to increase the agency's use of cash transfers. The use of a food-delivery model to some extent reflected the agency's focus on IDPs in Somalia. However, this meant that the bulk of Australian assistance did not catch the wave of cash-based programming that proved effective in famine areas. This significantly affected the efficacy of the Australian intervention in Somalia.

Figure 6 Regional breakdown of Australian financial assistance to Somalia through the World Food Programme



The strong focus on WFP did, however, deliver good outcomes in both Kenya and Ethiopia. In Kenya, Australia also gave \$8.6 million to WFP Kenya for the refugee-feeding operation. WFP used local implementing agencies to support a general food distribution and a supplementary feeding program. Given the huge influx of refugees to Kenya, the massive challenge this represented for the Government of Kenya, and the strong performance of WFP and UNHCR^d in meeting these challenges, this seems like both a sensible investment and a well-founded priority.

UN High Commission for Refugees

Outside Somalia, the second-largest overall commitment was for refugees in Kenya, principally in the Dadaab camp. Once again, part of this prioritisation was intended, and part of it determined by the UNHCR. Australia donated \$15 million to UNHCR for their regional refugee appeal, all of which was used in the Dadaab camps. As stated above, this funding was well justified and effectively used.

UN Common Humanitarian Fund

The UN Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) was very useful in the crisis, as it was only mechanism through which local (Somali) NGOs could be supported. Its decision-making process uses operational agencies to determine priorities, making it theoretically closer to the ground. It is also administratively straightforward, with opportunities for donors to engage at a strategic level in decision-making. However, the CHF process was slow throughout the period under examination. The ‘standard allocation’ took an average of three months to get money out to partners, and even the ‘emergency reserve’ (approximately 20 per cent of the CHF) took on average 11 weeks.³⁵ Compared to Australia’s two-week delivery³⁶ this is a critical flaw, especially in a famine where every day counts. The reason appears to have been administration based in Geneva (the CHF is run by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], part of the UN Secretariat and therefore subject to their rules)—an issue that constantly impedes such mechanisms.

^d While there were undoubtedly many challenges, the mortality rate remained below emergency standards in the Dadaab camp despite refugees arriving in extremely poor condition. This suggests the aid operation was effective in meeting immediate needs.

UN Children's Fund and UN Food and Agriculture Organization

In Somalia, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) were widely perceived to be among the best-performing UN agencies. They both had access in Al-Shabaab areas, and significantly expanded their programs to attempt to cover the absence of WFP. UNICEF's cash program, and its de facto lead in this sector, was excellent.³⁷ FAO also supported affected communities with cash transfers and used innovative measures such as the approach to Dubai-based Somali food traders to increase their presence. Other forms of assistance were also exploited by both agencies: UNICEF undertook significant water and sanitation work, and was the lead UN agency for nutrition supplying Plumpy'Nut (a high-energy peanut-based food), and FAO worked to improve livelihoods.

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) appears to have performed particularly well. The free food distribution that took place in south-central Somalia was largely delivered by the ICRC, who distributed food to about a million people. This was possible because the ICRC:

- › was very experienced in working in south-central Somalia
- › managed to remain in critical regions for longer than most other international organisations, as it was not expelled by Al-Shabaab until January 2012
- › engaged Somali program staff, who then subcontracted local assistance.

ICRC also supported the health clinics of the Somali Red Crescent Society (which enjoys a good reputation), as well as undertaking their traditional protection work.

Retrospectively, ICRC should probably have received more funding as, at the time funding allocations were made, they had access to the most severely affected areas of Somalia and, in interviews, indicated they had some capacity to use additional funding.

Overall partner choice

In hindsight, while partner performance was clearly related to their capacity to work in country contexts, the choice of implementing partners was appropriate overall. The funding of multiple UN agencies helped to achieve the strategic intention to focus assistance on Somalia and address food and refugee needs. A good learning point for the Australian aid program is the need to ensure that decision-making should place greater weight on the informed analysis of those closest to the operation including Post, program areas and other donors with extensive regional experience. Such an approach would have resulted in more funding for the ICRC, UNICEF and FAO, and proportionately slightly less for WFP.

Conclusions

- › Effectiveness of implementing partners was highly reliant on context.
- › WFP in Somalia took time to scale up and were constrained by access issues, which meant Australian funding did not immediately reach those most in need as intended. Later, once WFP became operational in Mogadishu and border regions, it did succeed in delivering food to famine victims.
- › Funding to WFP and UNHCR was used to provide much needed assistance to the refugees in Kenya, which was effective under the circumstances.

- › The Red Cross Movement (and ICRC in particular) performed consistently highly.
- › Of the UN agencies, UNICEF and the FAO performed well in Somalia, and WFP and UNHCR in Kenya. The CHF provides an excellent mechanism on many levels—reach, analytical ability, coordination, local NGOs—but was severely constrained by slow disbursement.
- › Decision-making should place greater weight on informed analysis provided by those closest to operations.

4.7 Appropriateness of NGO funding mechanisms

In the HoA crisis, funding mechanisms determined which NGOs were funded. Funds were allocated to NGOs that were in the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) or funded by the Australian public.

Humanitarian Partnership Agreement

The HPA was expedient rather than strategic in the HoA crisis. It disbursed funds quickly with minimal paperwork but with limited volumes in a protracted African crisis for which it was not specifically designed. All six HPA agencies had presence in the region and were able to prioritise effectively the funding among them to ensure funds went to the members best placed to respond. The consideration of proposals by the HPA NGO partners was based on OCHA assessments, in-country partners and public sources.³⁸ Beyond this, there was no intention to coordinate and there was limited collaboration within the HPA. Oxfam championing the use of gender action plans is an example of the collaboration that did occur.

The HPA partners conducted their own evaluation into the mechanism, finding that ‘projects generally met or exceeded the output targets in their implementation plans’ and ‘a number of examples of innovation and good practice can be found in project reporting’. Support provided to NGOs was used in Somalia but also Kenya and Ethiopia in the life-saving phase of the emergency immediately after the famine declaration.

The NGOs in the HPA mechanism were probably among the Australian NGOs best placed to deliver assistance in the HoA. However, like WFP, at least two had been excluded from south-central Somalia by Al-Shabaab. Several other NGOs, which did not have an Australian base, were much better placed to deliver assistance in the worst-affected parts of Somalia—for example, Action Against Hunger and the Danish Refugee Council. This is not to deny the good work highlighted by the HPA’s evaluation, but only to suggest that a mechanism designed for rapid response in Asia and the Pacific could not be expected to have the same ‘fit’ when applied to a famine in an area of conflict in east Africa.

The question of what might work better than the HPA is difficult to answer. One option is to let those closest to the crisis decide which agencies are best placed to respond to the most pressing need. However, this requires humanitarian liaison capacity and, potentially, means more administration (multiple grants), which could compromise speed. Working with locally based NGOs requires a mechanism to be in place to ensure due diligence. Other options include an adapted mechanism that allows for separate procedures for slow- and rapid-onset crises, or some way of assessing and funding potential new partners directly.



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.*

Dollar for Dollar Initiative

Opinions are divided on the merit of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative. It was organised at short notice and therefore had to be designed in a hurry. It required a significant amount of work and time to formulate and negotiate parameters (which donations could be accepted) and resulted in funding going to an inordinately large number of NGOs. By the time funds were being disbursed, the peak of the famine was over. Some NGOs were still spending funds when this evaluation was conducted. Funds were largely spent on recovery activities or long-term development rather than emergency assistance.

Like the HPA mechanism, the Dollar for Dollar Initiative was not necessarily the best way of channelling funds to organisations with operations in the heart of the famine zone. The majority of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative agencies, as with the HPA, acted as conduits for funding to sister agencies in the HoA, or into larger families of organisations. Where the funding went depended on where these organisations had presence. Much of the funding, for example, ended up in Kenya, because it had the greatest number of pre-existing agencies with links to Australian NGOs (usually engaged in long-term development work). These historical ties and agencies usually meant an intimate knowledge of the area, making for some excellent projects. In a small number of cases, however, it meant funds going to areas that were only marginally affected by the famine. One agency's rehabilitation of a water system in coastal Kenya falls into this category. In the future, the effectiveness of such schemes could be increased by the aid program directing that funds must be channelled to priority needs.

The large number of organisations funded through this initiative meant that it was administratively burdensome. A fundraising consortium or entity, able to receive and administer funds, could have streamlined the initiative. On the other hand, the Dollar for Dollar Initiative engaged the public and

was a major fundraising success.^e The reporting forms and formats seemed widely appreciated by the agencies, suggesting that work done in the initial scheme could be used or modified for any subsequent effort. A public engagement and fundraising strategy needs careful thought, in collaboration with NGOs, ahead of the next large-scale emergency.

What the Dollar for Dollar Initiative did offer, beyond public engagement and extra fundraising (two very big bonuses), was the opportunity to channel funds to NGOs that had no other opportunity to access Australian emergency aid. This is a serious consideration in the current funding architecture for emergency response, and one that needs to be looked at thoughtfully. There is no doubt that NGOs are one part of the large humanitarian architecture and they, like the other parts, need to function to contribute to an overall rapid and effective response. Learning from the HPA and Dollar for Dollar Initiative suggests the need for more such mechanisms, perhaps in conjunction with other donors, and perhaps on a regional- or crisis-specific basis.

Conclusions

- › The HPA enabled a rapid disbursement of funds and the funded NGOs achieved some good results. However, the HPA was not designed for the HoA context and, as a result, had mixed coverage.
- › The Dollar for Dollar Initiative raised funds and engaged the Australian public, but it was administratively burdensome and did not provide funding until late in 2011.
- › Some NGO-funded programs delivered critical life-saving assistance. Other programs focused on the recovery phase and built resilience.

4.8 Appropriateness of sectoral funding

Although Australian funding was generally focused on key sectors, there was also considerable spread across all sectors, largely as a result of NGO funding. In particular, funding provided through the Dollar for Dollar Initiative was provided without direction and, as a result, was spread across all sectors. The severity of the crisis meant that people needed assistance in all sectors.

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that a certain amount of focus is desirable. Funds dispersed too flexibly may not end up addressing the most urgent needs, and certainly may not flow to where Australia intends. Funds can be dispersed on the basis of addressing a particular sector or area, but it can be left up to the agencies on how exactly to address the problem. A strategy can outline broad focus—the sectors, places and people that are priorities—and the detail can be worked out collaboratively later. This is flexible, but also focused.

Conclusion

- › The aid program probably should have directed agencies towards the sectors that Australia wanted to fund and in so doing reduced some of the sectoral spread.

^e A report produced by Media Monitors for AusAID found that, in the 71 days between 5 October 2011 and 14 December 2011 (the period of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative), there were 137 separate media items. This coverage reached a cumulative audience of 9 062 444 people.



A water bladder provided by Save the Children in Darawish camp, Mogadishu. *Photo: Graham Mathieson, Save the Children*

4.9 Appropriateness of modes of assistance

With WFP as its main partner, Australian assistance was focused on funding of food aid. A 2012 evaluation of the WFP Somalia program for the past decade concluded that ‘there is a need to open up the debate on the relevance and impact of food aid, including its impact on vulnerable households, the dependency it generates and the degree to which it complements or undermines the agricultural/pastoral economy’.³⁹

In the famine epicentre, Al-Shabaab control made it very difficult, costly and dangerous to get food in. Some humanitarian agencies that were still able to work in these areas exploited a novel way of helping people that was already being piloted in Somalia—cash. Cash-based programming has been gaining credibility in humanitarian operations for a number of years (see Box 1). In Somalia, it was carried out on a massive scale in 2011–12, with more than US\$100 million in cash handed out, coordinated by UNICEF.

A recent evaluation of cash transfers, commissioned by UNICEF, concluded that,

*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.*⁴⁰

The UNICEF evaluation also found that even in the worst-affected areas of Somalia, cash transfers attracted merchants and people were able to buy food. Another benefit of this modality was that there was little diversion or stealing. If anything, the diversion rates appear to have been lower than with food. On balance, cash transfers benefited women and men equally and put decision-making at family level.⁴¹ Interviews conducted with beneficiaries of Australian aid in Wajir, Kenya, similarly found that cash transfers had been a valuable form of assistance (Box 2).

The fact that such a large-scale cash transfer program took place,^f in such a complex and risky environment, and was apparently successful, should be a clear signal to the Australian aid program.

Box 2 Beneficiaries views on cash transfers

Most women targeted did not have enough change of clothes and were able to buy some for themselves through the cash relief.

Woman beneficiary

Coming from a culture where women are looked down upon, this (the cash relief) greatly boosted the morale of the women and gave them a sense of self-worth and dignity.

Implementing agency staff

The elderly beneficiaries, who were mostly women, were happy because they had the freedom to buy easily chewable food such as liver.

Woman beneficiary

Conclusion

- › Cash transfers were an extremely important substitute for food distributions that worked well but were not fully exploited.

^f The UNICEF cash evaluation suggests that ‘the declaration of famine in July 2011 effectively created “consensus by compulsion in the face of famine” making significant funds available for a rapid cash-based response’.

5 Responding to needs

Key questions

- › Did the response meet the needs of affected people?
- › How did Australia's approach align with other policies and guidelines related to gender?
- › Did the response build on local capacities and government priorities where appropriate?
- › Were affected people involved in planning and implementing the response?
- › How was vulnerability, including gender issues, taken into account in targeting assistance?
- › Did the response address the protection needs of affected people?
- › How did Australia's assistance support recovery and resilience building?

5.1 Gender

The use of participatory and inclusive approaches and practices in line with Australian aid's *Humanitarian Action Policy* (2011) appeared to be standard among partner agencies and their implementing partners. As part of the evaluation, qualitative data on gender were collected for Australian-funded projects in northern Kenya (Wajir area).

Interviews found that programs of World Food Programme (WFP), Save the Children and Oxfam paid attention to the balance of men and women on committees involved in beneficiary identification and verification. Typically, relief committees set up to target the most vulnerable were required to have at least 50 per cent women. Obtaining the views of men and women in separate discussion forums was consistently confirmed as a requirement at project level. Programming intentionally designed to target women was common. Both food distribution and cash transfer projects targeted women.

About 80 per cent of the recipients of food distributed by WFP in Wajir were women. Women beneficiaries interviewed said that the food distributed helped them, because they did not have enough money to purchase food for their families. Beneficiaries also felt that their food management skills had improved through their work measuring food rations during the food collection and distribution process.

Most of the beneficiaries of cash transfers provided by Oxfam in Wajir were women. Although some cash-transfer programs were available through mobile banks, cash was mostly delivered at cash-collection points. Efforts were made to ensure collection points were close to the homes of beneficiaries so that women could easily and safely reach them (see Box 3). Women beneficiaries reported satisfaction with cash transfers, citing increased independence on a wide range of household expenditure decisions, expanded income generation options, ability to obtain credit and increased asset ownership in non-traditional areas (particularly livestock). Cash transfers were also valued because they allowed people to choose food items suitable for children and the elderly.

A few problems associated with cash transfers related to gender were identified. Some interviewees commented that the transfers changed fundamental gender relations. Some men were not happy that their wives were in control of the cash. Another issue was that the cash-collection process required identity cards, which many women did not have. A person or relative, typically a male, was required to sign on behalf of women without cards and often the signatory asked for a share of the cash.

Gender issues were also found to have been specifically addressed in a water, sanitation and hygiene program in Wajir implemented by Oxfam (see Box 3). Separate latrines for boys and girls were built to promote privacy for the girls during their menstrual cycle. Previously, the girls had to go home at this time, sometimes missing school or even dropping out of school completely. Additional bathing areas were constructed for girls to use during their monthly menstrual periods, as water was scarce in their homes. Hygiene awareness campaigns were accompanied by the provision of sanitary towels.

Box 3 Gender-sensitive programming

Previously, boys would tease the girls, a form of gender-based violence, when they suspected that it was 'that time of the month', causing girls to opt to abscond from school until their periods were over.

Woman beneficiary

Women increasingly raised voices about special needs such as sanitary materials, compared to the past when this was taboo.

Save the Children staff

The distances from the target beneficiary homes to cash collection points were short, and were planned in a manner that ensured safety for the household beneficiaries, who were mainly women.

Implementing agency staff

Partner commitment to including women in relief activities does not yet extend to analysing or addressing women's pre-existing workloads and burdens. In organising themselves to take on the responsibilities of humanitarian projects in addition to their everyday household tasks, beneficiary women described a range of negative coping methods including increased work for girls and elderly women, or extended workdays for themselves.

Reporting is an area where more needs to be done in terms of gender. While beneficiary data were routinely sex disaggregated at project level, most agencies subsequently aggregated this information at higher levels, precluding any gender analysis. Non-government organisation (NGO) partners noted that the Australian project proposal template requiring disaggregation by age, gender and disability was an effective planning tool but, unfortunately, the same attention was not given to disaggregation of results. Australian aid policy has recognised that such reporting is essential in planning and understanding the impacts of humanitarian assistance. The 2013–14 priority commitments of Australian aid's *2011 Humanitarian Action Policy implementation plan (2012)* are therefore extremely timely. The plan commits to collect data from implementing partners that articulates how assistance is provided by sex and age.

Conclusions

- › Appropriate consideration of gender appeared to be standard among partner agencies and their implementing partners.
- › Australia's partners employed gender-equity practices, particularly by targeting women for food vouchers and cash transfers.
- › There were inadequate strategies for monitoring outcomes in terms of gender, nor is beneficiary disaggregated data used analytically.

5.2 Local capacities and priorities

Understanding the local context is required for effective humanitarian assistance. Local organisations played important roles in the delivery of assistance in all three countries. Australia's contributions to WFP in Ethiopia and the Hunger Safety Net Programme^a in Kenya both supported local capacities. In some programs, implementing partners built on local capacities and priorities by working through agencies that were either local or had an established presence in the local area. For example, in Wajir in northern Kenya, WFP worked with Arid Lands Development Focus, Wajir South Development Association, Islamic Relief Kenya and Save the Children. In Somalia, remote management necessitated delegation to local partners and local teams. Consequently, Somali NGOs became the main aid-delivery mechanism and were probably significantly empowered as a result. Working with local organisations would have helped align Australian assistance with local priorities and may have played a significant part in building local capacities.

Conclusion

- › Australian assistance probably supported and built local capacity.



Red Cross worked closely with communities in Ethiopia and other countries across central Africa to support them with long-term access to water and sanitation facilities during the drought. *Photo: Jose Cendon, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*

^a The Hunger Safety Net Program is a social safety net, implemented by the Kenyan Government in the northern arid areas. It is funded by the United Kingdom, Australia and other international donors.

5.3 Beneficiary participation

Beneficiary participation was not a requirement of Australian funding, nor was it reported on.^b It is difficult to make an assessment of the degree of beneficiary participation, as programs were diverse and, in the south-central region of Somalia, work was done remotely with little monitoring or independent scrutiny. Also, the degree to which beneficiary participation is essential arguably depends on the type of assistance. The requirement for participation is less in emergency nutrition and medical care when the imperative is saving lives.

While there is a lack of strong evidence to determine whether beneficiaries were appropriately involved by agencies funded by Australia, circumstantial evidence and standard practice suggests that participation was probably patchy. The Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) undertook an interagency accountability and quality-mapping exercise, focusing primarily on northern Kenya.⁴² All of the NGOs funded under the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement or their parent bodies, as well as some other implementing partners, are members of HAP. HAP found that ‘community members highlighted the lack of clear community consultation and involvement in project proposal, planning, design, implementation and monitoring’.

This evaluation interviewed a small number of beneficiaries and local implementing partners of funded agencies in Wajir, northern Kenya. Findings from these interviews were different from those of the HAP. These interviews found that beneficiary participation had been facilitated in a number of ways (see Box 4). Communities may not have been involved in all stages of planning and implementation, but the majority of agencies engaged in ‘partial participation’—participation in one or more phases of the project cycle. The agencies funded by Australia engaged implementing partners that had a strong local profile. These partners recruited and used local expertise, providing an appropriate understanding of the context and cultural values, and building a sense of ownership. Local implementing staff for both WFP and Oxfam in Wajir consulted communities in the targeting process and implementation. The implementing agencies reached out to the local community through community leaders to establish relief committees. The most vulnerable members of communities were targeted in a consultative process involving relief committees, government-led district steering groups and various local-level working groups. The accuracy of targeting was validated through various means, including a public ‘baraza’ (meeting) organised by local leaders, forums (including some only for women) and a door-to-door verification process. Beneficiaries were also involved in distribution processes, teaching their acquired skills to others, handling complaints and providing feedback.

Conclusion

- › The degree of beneficiary participation was probably variable. Examples of good practice in the implementation of assistance programs were recorded.

^b There were no directives to partners with regard to participation—it was not a condition of funding nor did it appear in any of the documentation.

Box 4 Beneficiary participation

Local involvement was a key factor in achieving inclusive participation of women, men, boys and girls throughout the project cycles, strengthening community ownership and sustainability of initiatives after the emergency response.

Implementing agency staff

Investing in community complaints mechanisms, post-project community feedback and review meetings, and enhancement of accountability to beneficiaries created space for women to articulate their needs, changes in their status and also in gender relations.

Implementing agency staff



Local people were given opportunities to work on projects to improve water and sanitation facilities in their communities during and after the drought crisis. *Photo: Simone Novotny, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.*

5.4 Addressing vulnerabilities

As with participation, the evidence as to whether vulnerability was specifically addressed is patchy. Lack of access, poor data and partial analysis all meant that while there were examples of good practice, overall the picture was less clear.

Documentation and interviews indicated that vulnerabilities were generally included in program design by Australia's implementing partners. The majority of agencies used some form of community-based targeting. For example, as previously described, Australian-funded WFP and Oxfam projects in Wajir used a consultative process to assess needs so that those most vulnerable could be specifically targeted. This enabled priority to be given to female-headed households, the elderly, people with disabilities and orphaned children. The criteria and the formula for targeting varied from agency to

agency, and the evaluation's scope did not reach to analyse each one. Nor is there independent or academically rigorous analysis of what this meant for extremely vulnerable families or individuals in practice.

There is now emerging evidence that clan dynamics and marginalisation played a larger role in the famine than was understood at the time. A special issue of the *Global Food Security* journal in 2012 suggested the Reewin and Bantu groups had been the hardest hit, as they had during the 1991-92 famine.⁴³ Future responses should ensure that, where possible, humanitarian assistance is responsive to the needs of groups with a history of marginalisation.

Conclusions

- › Implementing partners made an effort to target vulnerable groups.
- › The needs of some marginalised groups appear to have been overlooked.

5.5 Protection

Protection needs were high in Somalia and across the region as large groups of people, predominantly women and children, travelled long distances in an attempt to escape famine and war. Protection work was extremely difficult, especially in Somalia, where access was limited and humanitarian agencies were often excluded.

The Australian aid program supports work to improve the safety of people in humanitarian emergencies. Protection was the focus of 3 per cent of total funds. This protection work supported covered diverse initiatives from child-friendly spaces to refugee legal protection and prisoner welfare. In hindsight, more might have been done programmatically in the area of protection. The recently developed protection framework⁴⁴ should help with future responses.

Conclusion

- › Protection was an important issue in the crisis.

5.6 Recovery and resilience

Australian funding was not split into emergency and recovery work. While it was not intended to specifically fund recovery or 'early recovery' work, a significant proportion of funding, especially that of NGOs, was used in this way. As previously noted, the Dollar for Dollar Initiative was not launched until November 2011—well after the peak of the famine—which meant it largely supported recovery work.

The fact that Australia's funding helped people get back on their feet is inherently good. Famine and food insecurity is characterised by distressed selling of assets before people start to starve. This means that even when people have been 'saved' by food or cash distributions or by specialist medical care, they remain extremely vulnerable. Affected people need to regain and hold assets to establish livelihoods. Recovery is also often the hardest phase to secure funding, as it occurs after the major crisis and can be expensive.

The proportion of Australian funds directed to the recovery phase could not be determined as agencies do not record expenditure in this way and there is no industry standard in defining the three phases of humanitarian responses—emergency life-saving assistance; care and maintenance (where

people are in refugee or displaced people camps—not in danger of starving but dependent on aid); and recovery.

In future responses, especially in situations where loss of assets or income is a major factor in vulnerability, Australia should consider reserving some funding to assist recovery. Even with limited funding the argument for helping people recover is strong; when there are more funds available such an approach is consistent with best practice. Requiring agencies to be transparent about how the funds received are used in terms of emergency response or recovery would help in making such allocations and in reporting back to the public.

The aftermath of traumatic events such as war and famine can create opportunities for change, which builds resilience. Pre-existing social protection programs in Ethiopia and Kenya built resilience, which mitigated some of the consequences of the crisis. In 2012, Australia made a \$30-million contribution to the Kenyan Hunger Safety Net Programme, alongside a much larger grant from the United Kingdom Department for International Development. Through this program, people are assisted with cash and if there is devastating drought, as there was in 2011, it can surge to meet additional demand. This grant is somewhat outside the terms of reference of this evaluation but through building resilience it is likely to be a sound investment.

Conclusions

- › Funds were not specifically allocated to recovery but a portion of Australian funding was used for recovery activities.
- › The investment in the Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme is potentially a good investment in resilience, offering the potential of reducing the impact of future crises.



Recovery work included working with local communities to provide advice and cash grants to support improved irrigation and farming. *Photo: Kenya Red Cross.*

6 Achievements of Australian assistance

Key questions

- › How many lives were saved and how many people were assisted?
- › Which aspects of the response provided best value for money?
- › Overall, how well did Australian assistance align with good humanitarian donorship principles?

This evaluation has concluded that Australia's assistance in the Horn of Africa (HoA) was in keeping with the scale of the crisis. However, unless the Australian public is assured of the efficacy of aid, and not just its morality, the consensus underpinning such large actions may not survive.

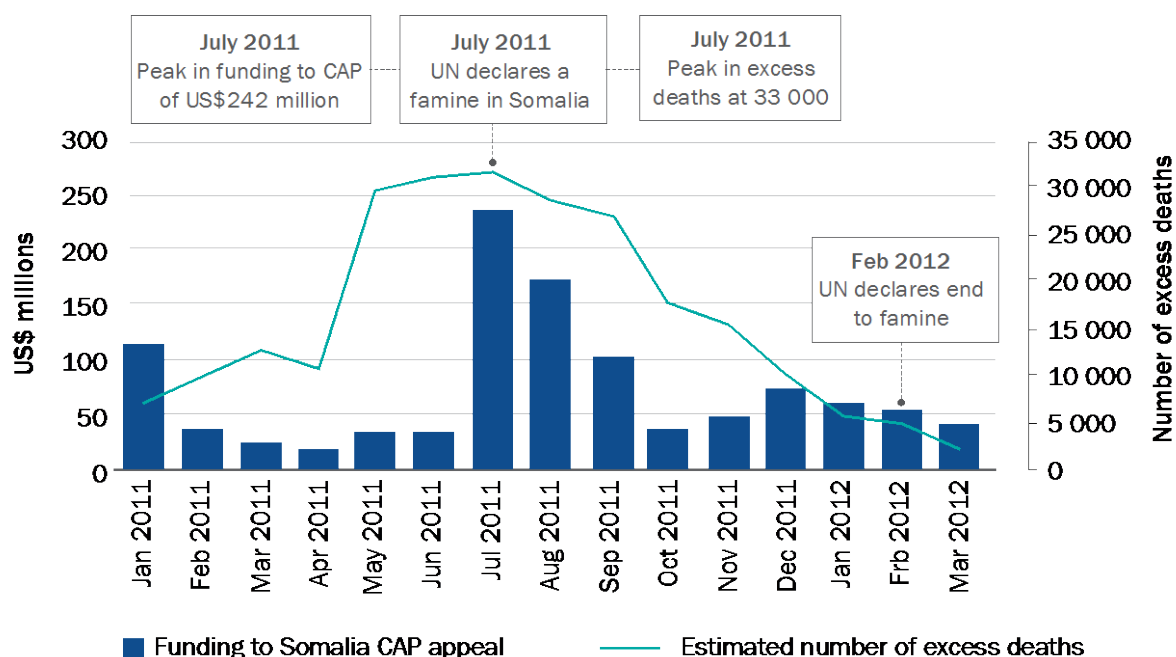
Estimation of the impact of Australia's response to the HoA crisis is challenging and technically imprecise. The data do not exist on which to make a rigorous judgement. Results are assessed in terms of the number of people assisted, value for money and alignment with good humanitarian donorship principles. The number of people helped was estimated from the overall impact of the international response and the numbers of beneficiaries reported by implementing partners.

6.1 Impact of the international response

The HoA crisis provides evidence that aid works (and that the counterfactual is true—withdrawing aid can have harmful consequences). The withdrawal of large aid volumes in 2010 was a significant factor in the subsequent Somali famine.⁴⁵ The fact that Somalia's neighbours (Kenya and especially Ethiopia) who continued to receive assistance did not suffer so acutely also shows that aid and safety nets work.⁴⁶

The reduction of mortality in Somalia following resumption of large aid volumes after the declaration of famine also suggests strongly that humanitarian aid can save lives. In Somalia, the famine has recently been estimated to have caused many deaths from May and July 2011 (Figure 7). The humanitarian response rapidly scaled up from the end of July when famine was declared. In Somalia as a whole, the number of deaths due to the famine (the number of excess deaths) was already reduced by August and then declined further. Famine was not prevented but humanitarian assistance may have cut it short and rendered some people less vulnerable.

Figure 7 Mortality and funding to the United Nations consolidated appeal process for Somalia



CAP = consolidated appeal process

Source: Redrawn from F Checchi & W Courtland Robinson, *Mortality among populations of southern and central Somalia affected by severe food insecurity and famine during 2010–2012*. a study commissioned by FAO/FSNAU and FEWS NET from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2013.

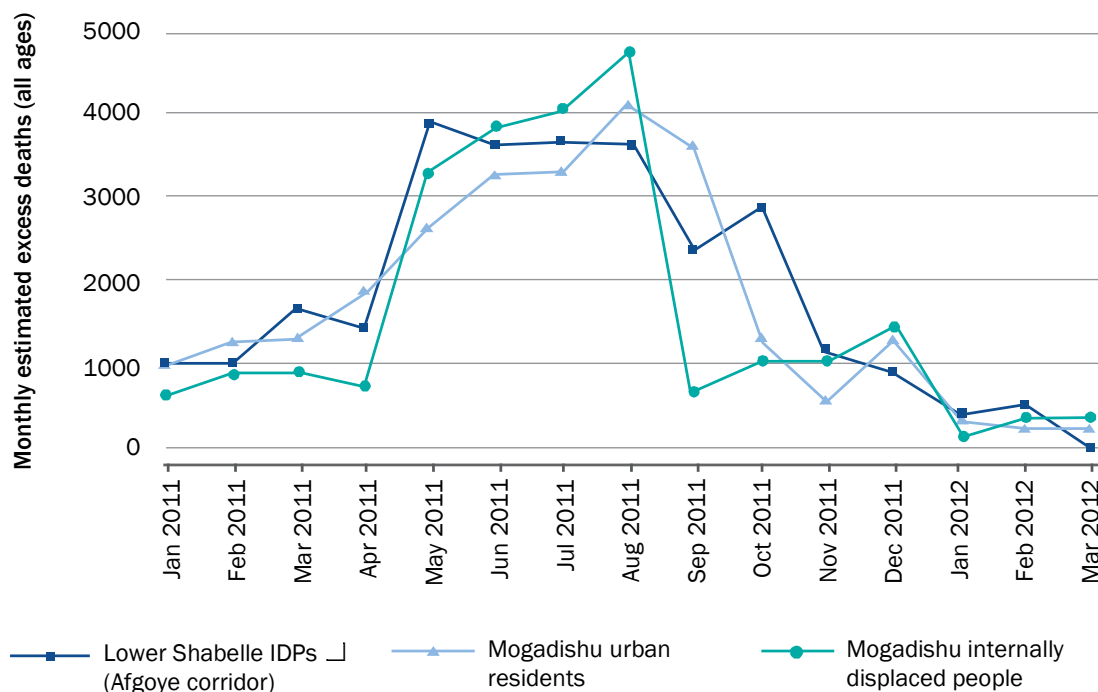
While Australian assistance to WFP was probably not a major factor in the initial reductions in mortality in Somalia in August, it certainly would have been significant in later reductions. World Food Programme (WFP) began scaling up in August 2011, partly as a result of receiving Australian support. By the end of August, WFP was beginning to be operational in border areas and Mogadishu, reporting it had delivered tonnes of food commodities, high-energy biscuits, maize and oil, as well as Plumpy’Sup (a ready-to-use supplementary food developed for the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in children more than 6 months old). By September, WFP was reporting that general food distribution, wet feeding, institutional feeding and a targeted supplementary feeding program were underway.

In Mogadishu, reductions in mortality also coincided with the resumption of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian operations in Mogadishu scaled up after the departure of Al-Shabaab in August.⁴⁷ A well-funded mortality study in Mogadishu produced the most reliable mortality data for Somalia (Figure 8). This study found that, by September, mortality rates had fallen or were starting to fall for residents and internally displaced people in or around Mogadishu. The Afgoye corridor in the Shabelle valley is a previously rural area outside Mogadishu that became home to the largest single concentration of internally displaced people in the world in 2010–11. Australia’s contribution to the International Committee of the Red Cross in August 2011, which supported food distribution in areas of great need including the lower Shabelle valley in south-central Somalia, would also have helped reduced mortality.

The Australian humanitarian response to refugees outside Somalia was also lifesaving. The refugee response was effective in Kenya but took time to scale up in Ethiopia. In Kenya, Australia supported

refugees through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and through food provided by WFP.

Figure 8 Estimated excess monthly mortality in and around Mogadishu throughout 2011



IDPs = internally displaced persons

Source: Adapted from: F Checchi & WC Robinson, *Mortality among populations of southern and central Somalia affected by severe food insecurity and famine during 2010–12*. A study commissioned by FAO/FSNAU and FEWS NET from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2013.

Caution is needed in making an optimistic interpretation of the mortality figures. Although reductions in mortality rates fell from July onwards when the international humanitarian response increased, it may not have been the only factor in the decline. Many of the weakest might have already died, meaning that mortality may have declined to some extent without intervention.

6.2 Partner reporting on results

This evaluation invested considerable time and effort in trying to obtain accurate results from implementing partners. The lack of agreed definitions and a framework for results, either internationally or within the Australian aid program, means that there is wide variation in what is called a ‘result’. This evaluation used the metric of ‘people reached’ in attempting to quantify results. ‘People reached’ is not, on its own, technically a ‘result’ as it says nothing about whether the assistance was useful. It is assumed that people who were reached benefited from the assistance they received.

Number of beneficiaries

The reporting formats of both the HPA and Dollar for Dollar Initiative asked funded non-government organisations (NGOs) for beneficiary numbers. Estimation of beneficiary numbers in the HoA crisis was complicated, as people were severely affected and had many needs. For example, a family fleeing famine and war in south-central Somalia and arriving in Mogadishu would have needed shelter, essentials to cook and wash with and clothes and food. The children would probably have

needed nutritional support and health care. Individual agencies may or may not have reduced beneficiary counts to allow for people who received multiple forms of assistance.

Estimates of beneficiary numbers are also complicated because some people benefit directly whereas others benefit indirectly. For example, an NGO that supplied water in a project funded through the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) listed the entire population of the district as beneficiaries. The Dollar for Dollar Initiative reporting format was perhaps more useful than that of the HPA, because it asked for numbers of both direct and indirect beneficiaries. The difficulty in estimating beneficiary numbers is illustrated by assistance provided in refugee camps. It is quite likely that everyone in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya was helped in some way by the \$15 million that Australia provided to UNHCR (perhaps through a water system provided, their garbage being collected or a visit to a clinic). Does this mean that all 494 651 people in the camp should be counted as beneficiaries?

Grant agreements with United Nations (UN) agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did not require specific reporting on numbers of beneficiaries reached with Australian assistance. As a result, UN agencies did not provide numbers of beneficiaries of Australian assistance. Beneficiary numbers are estimated from the total beneficiary numbers reported by the agency and the percentage of agency funds provided by Australia.

The number of beneficiaries for each agency is shown in Figure 9. Most of the beneficiaries of UN and ICRC funding were in Somalia. In contrast, about half of the beneficiaries of NGOs were in Kenya, a quarter was in Somalia and another quarter was in Ethiopia.

Aggregation of beneficiary numbers

The aggregated beneficiary numbers for Australian assistance by type of agency are shown in Figure 9. When results for all agencies are combined, Australian assistance is estimated to have benefited 3.7 million people. This is a quarter of those in need, with Australian funds being less than a twentieth of the total funds used in the crisis.

Aggregating beneficiary counts from different agencies and donors tends to overestimate the total number of people reached so that the counts may exceed total number of people in need of assistance. Overestimation is inevitable as it is not possible to make adjustments for beneficiaries receiving multiple forms of assistance when it is provided by different agencies and funded by multiple donors. A family in a refugee camp may be provided the tent through Australian funding to UNHCR, food funded by the United States, clothes funded by the United Kingdom, nutritional care funded by Sweden, cooking equipment funded by Turkey and so on.

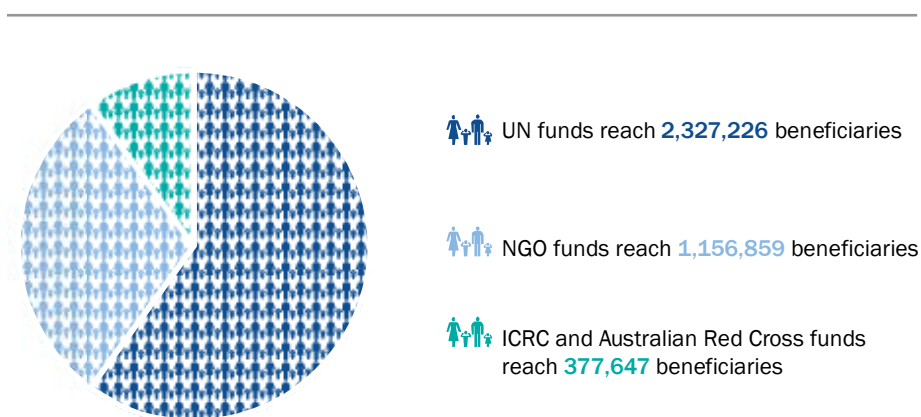
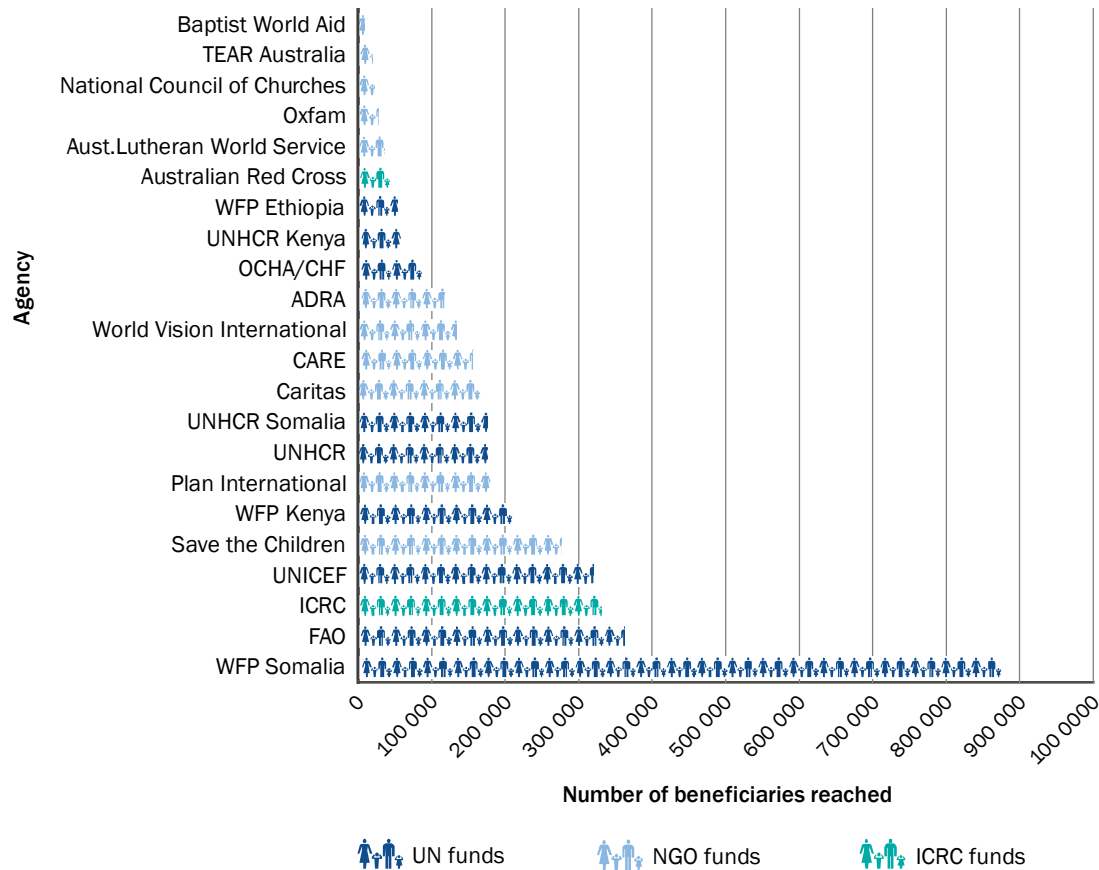
The Australian aid program has quite logically adopted the phrase 'instance of life-saving assistance' to try to resolve this dilemma. However, through this way of tallying results, the Australian aid program concluded it had achieved 6 493 922 'instances of life-saving assistance', which is equivalent to about half those estimated to be in need of assistance. Better ways to quantify results are needed.

The overall effectiveness of humanitarian responses could be examined using broad public health indicators to make judgements about whether populations overall were stabilised and ultimately recovered. This might also include economic indicators for the recovery phase of the aftermath of an emergency. Indicators would be measures of what the agency set out to achieve, which in turn would be connected to what was achievable.

Against the backdrop of public scrutiny of aid, the continued inability of the humanitarian sector to reliably measure outcomes and impact is unsatisfactory. One aspect of this has to be donor

behaviour, and the resources available for this measurement. Studies such as the mortality study conducted by John Hopkins University, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and UN Food and Agriculture Organization⁴⁸ are costly and require interagency collaboration. Donors working together to fund such studies or data collection can yield high-value information.

Figure 9 Number of beneficiaries of Australian assistance by agency



CHF = UN Common Humanitarian Fund; FAO = UN Food and Agriculture Organization; ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross; OCHA = UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; UNHCR = UN High Commission for Refugees; UNICEF = UN Children’s Fund; WFP = UN World Food Programme

Conclusions

- › Partners did not provide sufficiently detailed reporting to allow the Australian aid program to adequately determine what had been achieved with Australian funding.
- › It is difficult to estimate the numbers of people, but it is clear that lives were saved and Australian aid reached many people.
- › There is currently no reliable framework for estimating results of humanitarian responses, either internationally or within the Australian aid program.
- › The use of mortality, morbidity and public health data are potentially more useful for policy-makers and taxpayers than number tallies.

6.3 Value for money

Donors, including Australia, have begun to focus on value for money in humanitarian action. This evaluation attempted to determine if any conclusions could be made about value for money for Australian assistance in the HoA. The analysis was limited to a simple cost-per-beneficiary method, as these were the only data available. Even these data were not available for UN agencies.

Review of the crude cost-per-beneficiary showed it to be flawed as a measure of value for money, because it does not compare like with like. The analysis did, however, identify factors that are of general relevance in attempts to develop measures of value for money:

- › **Costs depend on context:** The cost of goods and services differ according to availability, transport, taxation and so on. Providing services in a location close to a major urban area is almost certainly cheaper than providing them in remote areas. Security is a huge cost, so delivering assistance in conflict-affected areas will invariably be relatively expensive. Costs per beneficiary for projects in Ethiopia were on average 'cheaper' than for projects in Kenya and Somalia (averages: Ethiopia \$13.80, Somalia \$23.89 and Kenya \$39.21).
- › **Costs reflect the type of assistance:** The type of assistance provided clearly has an impact on costs. For example, the cost for an individual to attend a session on hand-washing is much less than the cost of a medical procedure.
- › **Different forms of humanitarian action have different values:** Some forms of humanitarian action have a greater 'value' than others. For instance, critical medical treatment is probably of greater value than clothing. These two actions are also vastly different in cost. The use of a simple cost-per-beneficiary metric therefore could end up prioritising lower cost programs that do not necessarily have the same impact.
- › **Value depends on outcomes not outputs or inputs:** The cost-per-beneficiary calculations are typically made on an input basis (i.e. the value of things bought divided by the number of people they are nominally supposed to help), rather than an output (i.e. whether people actually received these items) or outcome basis (whether they were effective). If a commodity is not delivered to the intended recipient at the time it is needed, it does not represent good value for money. Examples of this are items that sit in a warehouse until after the crisis, seeds that miss the planting season or water pumps that do not work. Inputs are typically used as they are easier to quantify than outcomes. The difficulty of estimating outcomes means that reporting typically uses measures related to desired outcomes. This can be illustrated by the Oxfam cash transfers in Kenya. As improved nutritional status could not be measured, the proportion of household food expenditure the payment represented and the diversity in diets was reported. Outcomes reflect the quality of inputs and how well they match needs. Clearly water that is clean

has more value than contaminated water. Providing clean water is only valuable if it is not already available.

- › **Numbers can be positively interpreted:** The lack of clarity from all humanitarian donors about value for money means that agencies are able to, and some may feel obliged to, combine expensive interventions with low-cost programs that reach large numbers of beneficiaries to lower the cost per beneficiary.
- › **Gathering information is difficult in challenging places:** In a context such as Somalia, independent implementation is almost impossible and independent monitoring even more challenging and costly. Estimates of beneficiary numbers will be less accurate in such contexts.

Clearly, more work is needed before meaningful measures of value for money in humanitarian action can be made. There is a need to define different categories of intervention by their worth, give resources to agencies to measure outputs and outcomes as well as inputs, and independently scrutinise reporting. Furthermore, past performance in terms of value for money is not necessarily an indicator of future performance, which is largely influenced by context and the competence of the teams in charge.

Several agencies have started to build a 'library' of costs of different types of humanitarian action from one emergency to another. This will facilitate rational review of whether interventions are good value and which interventions should be pursued. Australia should review the work of donor agencies, such as the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the European Community Humanitarian Office, that have these libraries to see whether this or similar work would be of value to the Australian aid program.

Conclusions

- › Value for money is not a well-developed concept in humanitarian action and, as a result, is not systematically measured or reported on.
- › Cost per beneficiary is not useful as a measure of value for money.
- › Australian aid needs to have a model of 'value' including factors such as timeliness and quality, and considering outcomes, not just inputs or outputs. Resourcing measurement and oversight is an important aspect of this.
- › A 'library' of costs might allow Australia to compare like with like, although this may be costly and time consuming to maintain.

6.4 Alignment with principles of good humanitarian donorship

Good humanitarian donorship is a concept and approach that was agreed among 17 donors (including Australia) in Stockholm in 2003. The agreement centred on a set of principles to guide donor behaviour.⁴⁹ The 23 principles are grouped by the principles of humanitarian assistance, general principles, good practice in funding, standards setting and accountability.

This evaluation rated Australia's HoA response based on the 23 principles of good humanitarian donorship (Table 7). A simple numerical score was used, with 2 representing compliance, 1 representing partial compliance and 0 no compliance. A score above two-thirds was deemed *good* or *excellent*, and below *adequate* or *poor*.

Table 7 How Australia assistance performed against good humanitarian donorship 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

Overall, Australian humanitarian assistance in the HoA was found to be well aligned with the principles of good humanitarian donorship. Australia scores well in its approach to humanitarian principles, funding and the application of standards, but less well in accountability and learning. This reflects the findings of this evaluation that Australia was extremely responsive and provided appropriate levels of funding, but was less able to follow up—especially to monitor aid flows and agency performance.

Conclusion

- › Australian assistance well aligned with the principles of good humanitarian donorship in all areas other than learning and accountability.

7 Recommendations

- 1 DFAT should **develop procedures for responding to slow-onset** humanitarian crises.
 - i. A simple activation mechanism that identifies which section is in the lead and the likely level of financial commitment.
 - ii. A strategy development process that sets priorities, targets specific outcomes, shapes the funding portfolio and identifies activities distinct from funding needed to increase the effectiveness of Australian assistance.
 - iii. Key elements of a staffing plan with an appropriate surge capacity to ensure requisite human resources to deliver and monitor humanitarian assistance. The plan should include support for staff to deal with the stresses of their work, as well as monitoring of workloads and wellbeing of staff by individuals not involved in the response.
- 2 DFAT should **develop clear measures of success** for humanitarian action and ensure that arrangements with partners include specific reporting against these measures.
 - i. Identify measureable indicators for strategic outcomes, such as food security, protection and resilience.
 - ii. Work with partners to develop better outcome monitoring systems and to ensure more equitable outcomes for ethnic minority groups, women and children.
 - iii. Set out reporting requirements in formal agency-level grant agreements with implementing partners, especially United Nations agencies. This reporting should include detailed financial accounting, as well as specific reporting on outputs and outcomes achieved.
 - iv. Work with key partners to develop thinking about value for money in humanitarian action. Consider developing a 'library' of costs that can be used as benchmarks for programming in various contexts.
- 3 DFAT should continue to **build humanitarian cadre and expertise**.
 - i. Increase in-house knowledge in key areas that are essential to understanding and responding to slow-onset crises, notably early warning, early action, resilience and multiyear funding.
 - ii. Identify the most appropriate types and level of technical specialism and niche roles for the Australian aid program in chronic food and protracted conflict emergencies, and improve and increase skills in these areas.
 - iii. Continue to invest in policy and advocacy capacity to engage with the humanitarian system, contributing to its overall effectiveness.
 - iv. Ensure there are sufficient geographical humanitarian positions to be prepared for spikes in crises.
 - v. Adapt surge-capacity arrangements to bring in humanitarian skills to support programs dealing with slow-onset emergencies at short notice.

- 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.
 - i. Routinely consider options for cash-transfer programming and ensure partners consider this as a first rather than a last option. Ensure cash is targeted at women where appropriate.
 - ii. Devolve decision-making to humanitarian and geographical professionals on technical issues where possible, and to Post and field teams where there is sufficient capacity.
 - iv. Continue to investigate with others how early warning data can be translated into early and appropriate action.

- 5 DFAT should **develop strategies to better mobilise resources** in response to slow-onset humanitarian crises.
 - i. In partnership with Australian Council for International Development and the private sector, explore innovative public fundraising and outreach that builds on the success of the Dollar for Dollar Initiative.
 - ii. Examine options for a mechanism like the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement that can be adapted to different contexts and geographic locations.
 - iii. Continue to use pooled funding-type arrangements such as the United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund, but work with the United Nations to speed up disbursement.
 - iv. Develop new mechanisms, or modify existing ones, to fund non-government organisations directly, including those without an Australian base, where they are clearly the best placed to deliver lifesaving assistance.
 - v. Ensure that the speed of disbursement seen in the Horn of Africa crisis is maintained.

- 6 DFAT should **increase humanitarian liaison capacity** in regions outside the traditional geographic focuses of the aid program.
 - i. Strengthen working relationships with humanitarian counterparts in other donor missions to identify division of labour opportunities, including options for delegated cooperation and/or shared resources.
 - ii. Invest in coordination at a country level, either through direct hosting arrangements (as with the donor coordination for Somalia) or through personnel deployments into the United Nations system.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development, integrated into DFAT from November 2013
CHF	United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning System Network
FSNAU	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit
HoA	Horn of Africa
HPA	Humanitarian Partnership Agreement
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	non-government organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
RRT	rapid response team
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

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