

SUCCESS STORY

Confronting El Niño in Somalia

Improving Food Security While Preventing Floods and Responding to Drought



Photo Credit: Ministry of Agriculture of the Federal Government of Somalia

Workers from participating households in southern Somalia fill sandbags and position them along broken riverbanks to prevent flooding. In exchange, they receive cash to buy urgently needed food.

USAID-funded program uses cash-for-work activities to help food insecure households meet immediate needs and build resilience while saving lives and saving farmers millions

In the Middle and Lower Shabelle regions of south-central Somalia, the Shabelle River has two faces. It provides the life-giving water for hectares of agricultural farmland; during the rainy season, however, it can quickly turn destructive, damaging crops and forcing people from their homes. This past season, the cycle of harmful flooding was broken by a USAID-funded program that contributed to the repair of 72 points along the banks of the Shabelle River and saved Somali farmers an estimated \$6.7 million in maize yields alone.

The 2015/2016 El Niño phenomenon was predicted to be one of the strongest in recorded history, according to early warning systems including the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Somalia Water and Land Information Management (SWALIM), both benefitting from USAID funding. The humanitarian community—with support from USAID—worked together with Somali authorities to quickly put a preparedness plan in place. For southern and central Somalia, forecasts warned that El Niño would trigger severe flooding, while predictions for parts of northern Somalia indicated that people would face yet another year of failed rains and drought conditions. As predicted, beginning in October 2015, heavy rainfall generated floods in south-central Somalia, affecting 145,000 people, including 42,000 temporary displacements.

Prior to the El Niño event, USAID had been supporting an FAO program that links food-insecure households to cash-for-work (CFW) opportunities. With those cash payments, food-insecure households are able to purchase urgently needed food commodities, immediately improving household food security. These activities also support long-term food security by supporting work activities that improve community assets—such as rehabilitation of water catchments—and provide support for local markets. With the expected heavy El Niño rains, USAID worked with FAO to refocus the program, analyzing satellite images and gathering field observations to identify breaks in the riverbanks along the Shabelle River which could be repaired. From this analysis, USAID and FAO worked together to modify the CFW activities to carry out these repairs.

In September 2015, workers from the participating households filled sandbags and positioned them along broken riverbanks. In exchange, the workers received cash wages, ensuring they could buy urgently needed food in local markets. In addition, the United Kingdom funded FAO work to repair riverbanks where heavy equipment was needed. Together, these efforts made a significant impact. FAO estimates these activities reduced the flooding of

agricultural land by 43 percent in Jowhar and Mahdayae Weyne districts.

Additionally, a USAID-supported program helped spread early warning messages via radio and mobile phones to alert communities to when floods were coming and instruct them to move to higher ground. These actions were a crucial part in El Niño preparedness activities in Somalia, linking early warning systems with robust and coordinated action ahead of an anticipated shock. These efforts helped save lives and household livelihoods, prevented destruction of valuable cropland, and addressed the food and nutrition needs of El Niño-affected populations.

In the north, El Niño has had the opposite effect, causing below normal rainfall and harsh drought, weakening livestock and reducing crop yields. In these areas, USAID supported CFW activities for rehabilitation of water catchments and other water resources and provided in-kind food and nutrition assistance to meet the urgent food assistance needs of people in drought-affected areas of Puntland and Somaliland. USAID provided support for nearly 250,000 affected individuals with in-kind food assistance, CFW and voucher food security, and nutrition interventions. USAID's humanitarian offices have worked together, along with our implementing partners, to provide coordinated non-food interventions, including emergency water trucking, distribution of critical relief item kits and animal fodder, and hygiene promotion.

In early 2016, approximately 5,400 drought-affected families in Somaliland engaged in FAO CFW activities funded by multiple USAID humanitarian offices. By rehabilitating water catchments and constructing soil bunds—a technique used to retain soil moisture and reduce soil erosion—communities can keep their livestock healthy and crops can grow as soon as the rains fall. The water catchments can hold enough water for 60,000 livestock for three months, the duration of a typical dry season. These catchments are strategically located, following the migratory livestock routes to keep animals alive where they otherwise might die from lack of water.

Since October 2014, USAID has provided approximately \$150 million in food assistance to support food-insecure Somali households and internally displaced populations countrywide. By quickly mobilizing humanitarian assistance, modifying programming, and coordinating with other donors and host country governments, USAID uses food assistance to respond to immediate, urgent needs as well as help prevent disaster and aid recovery and resilience in Somalia.



Photo Credit: UN FAO

Communities in northern Somalia have been impacted by harsh drought. They rehabilitate water catchments and construct soil bunds as part of USAID supported cash-for-work activities.

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