

WAR AND FAMINE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: A HUMAN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT The Horn of Africa is plagued with persistent occurrence of civil wars and famine for about two decades. Civil war remains the most potent factor responsible for famine in the region. The impact of these disasters have had disastrous effects on the human ecology in the Horn. However, such human impacts are not evenly distributed on the basis of sex, occupation, age and space. This article therefore tries to unfold the various ramifications by which civil wars in the Horn account for famine disaster. It also unfolds the impact of civil wars and famine in the region on the people, by examining and assessing who is affected and who is not, how and why.

War and famine are the two most recurrent disasters that continue to cause enough human ecological degradation in the Horn of Africa. Most of the times when issues about war are discussed in literatures the central focus is on the war itself without indepths analysis of its human impacts. Civil wars which are pervasive in the Horn, have created disequilibrium between humans and their environment. One of the manifestation of this disequilibrium is famine and its accompanied human impacts.

This article assess the human impacts of these two disasters in the context of human ecology. This is done on the basis of age, sex, occupation, mortality and spatial dislocation of the victims of these disasters. To achieve this goal, the article analysis the potency of drought vis-a-vis civil war in explaining the cause of famine in the region.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO FAMINE VULNERABILITY

The effect of war and famine concern people, for without people there can be no famine. Vulnerability to famine is a product of an on going system. System concept is therefore a useful approach to be used in understanding how and the extend to which society becomes vulnerable to risks of these disasters.

Mariam (1986) developed a conceptual framework in explaining various ways by which society becomes vulnerable to famine. She emphasised that, the peasant world has two principal relationships with nature and political and socio-economic subsystems. Thus, one set of relationship binds the peasant to the natural conditions which is characterised by an almost total dependence of the peasant on nature. This dependence may yield benefit as well as risk. Under normal (positive) conditions peasants interaction with the natural forces may yield subsistence, but when conditions deviate from normal (negative), peasants are faced with the risk of being without subsistence, this is where they become vulnerable to famine.

On the otherhand, peasants are also held by a series of influences and obligations with their socio-economic and political environment. So that, even if peasants have beneficial relationships with their natural environment, in the form of high yields which may generate resources to them, the fact that they have another relationship with the political and socio-economic forces which are characterised by economic exploitation and political oppression, they will still remain vulnerable to famine. The extreme of these exploitations may lead to political riot, violent and ultimate war may erupt which may go to accentuate the vulnerability of the subsistence producer system to famine and abject poverty.

Furthermore, the degree by which an individual may be vulnerable to famine is also a product of a system, which involves a relationship among material, organizational and socio-psychological vulnerability. Individuals with less resources become highly materially vulnerable, while poor support structures like breakdown of kinship ties and medical services may expose the individual to highly organizational vulnerability. Vulnerability to the effects of famine also depends on the mental ability of an individual to cope with the traumas that he or she has suffered from the effect of war and famine, this defines his or her socio-psychological vulnerability. These various vulnerabilities are inter-related and this helps to define totality to which an individual becomes susceptible to the effect of these disasters.

CAUSES OF FAMINE IN THE HORN: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

Various reasons have been given by many authors in explaining the cause of famine in the Horn of Africa. The most notable one often mentioned and that permeates the literatures is drought. This section will critically assess the potency of drought vis-a-vis civil war as agent responsible for famine in the region.

Drought

Famine in the Horn is often explained by drought since the region is well noted for drought. Thus, according to Hewitt (1983) most famines are associated with drought as such the actual incidence of famine can be identified with weather vagaries. In Ethiopia between the period 1953-84 there had been a total of 13 years of drought when rainfall fell below normal. In 1984 the country experienced the worst drought ever when rainfall deviated to almost -45 cm. Between the 5-year period of 1980-84 alone there was four years of rainfall deficit in Ethiopia. This may actually convince anyone that the famine that occurred in 1984-85 in the Horn was a result of drought than any other factor. In Sudan, data on rainfall trends has also portrayed that the country has been experiencing severe rainfall deficiencies since 1900, and most severely between 1968-85 with an unprecedented amount of -2.5 of the standard score (Hashim, 1986).

It may however sound convincing to say that famine is an outcome of drought, but it should be noted that drought per se is not a factor that may cause famine and expose people to become vulnerable to it in the Horn. The degree to which drought may cause damage to crop production and to which this may affect human population depends importantly on the political and socio-economic conditions prevailing in the society.

To give a lucid view of this fact, it is well known that severe droughts have occurred in the United States and some parts of Europe, but such droughts did not cause any serious damage to food production (Walker, 1989). However, a similar intensity of such droughts in the Horn has always been associated with catastrophic consequences on plants, animals and human life. Furthermore, countries like Boukina Fasso, Mali and Niger for which drought is a permanent condition, famine is not a permanent feature since the condition of permanent drought has been accepted as normal and the people have adopted coping strategies to it.

This fact seems to suggest that drought as a purely natural condition must be separated from possible consequences of drought into which human action and interaction enters. The association between drought and famine in the Horn is therefore questionable. For instance, Mariam (1986) established in her research the statistical relationship (correlational analysis) between drought and famine in the Horn to be 0.39. This value attests to the fact that there is a weak relationship between drought and famine in the region. It is therefore important that one should not confuse drought with famine in the Horn.

War and war-related policies

The most fundamental cause of famine in the Horn is civil war. War in the region should be seen as tipping the balance between survival and starvation. Conflicts in the region have drained substantial financial resources from the economies of the countries in the Horn. Ethiopia for instance, spends 46% (US \$40 million) of her GNP annually on arms purchase (Walker, 1989). In relation to the budget, 50% (the highest) of Ethiopia 1988 budget was also allocated to defense at the expense of viable economic sectors.

In Ethiopia during the period 1970-79 the defense budget alone increased by 388% (US \$66 million to 322 million) while the total budget itself increased only by 190% (Silvard, 1985). It was also reported during the 100th U.S Congressional Hearings on Famine in Ethiopia in 1990 that the country spent a total of US \$4 billion on arm purchased alone during 1980-89.

According to the report if this expenditure is related to the total GNP over the same period, then Ethiopia's expenditure on arms was twice higher than that of United States. Thus, large financial resources that went into military spending were made possible at the expense of food and other economic production. These resources could have been used to boost agricultural and other economic production which could have gone a long way to prevent famine in the region. It was therefore not surprising that famine in the 1980's became the prevalent issue in the region.

During the 100th U.S Congressional Hearings on Famine in Ethiopia, Father Carroll Houle and Nicholas Molten testified that war was the main factor responsible for famine in the region. They gave various reasons to support their assertion. These included the disruption of relief shipment and supply by the war, the reinforcement of exploitation by armed personnel, the siphoning of food production and medical supplies from civilian camp to army camp, the prevention of food production in agricultural zones as farms were bombed and farmers were dislocated by the war. In addition to these reasons, bombing of market places, vehicles and transportation network which are often resorted to by the warring factions also contributed to the disruption of food distribution to needy and isolated areas.

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These diabolic activities have had a destructive impact on the local economies and in various ways culminated into virtually lost of income to peasants. The impoverishment created by these negative actions was so acute that even when food was made available to the local people (through imports and commercial food aid) the acquisition of it by the use of money is rendered impossible. The resultant effect was famine in a situation of abundant resources.

Furthermore, new taxes which are often imposed on peasants during famine periods must be seen as one of the cogent reason that places civil war in the centre of famine in the region. These new taxes are meant to finance the extra burden brought by civil war and drought in the region. Table 2 below shows a typical case of tax commitment of an average peasant in Ethiopia during time of disaster. The implication of this was that peasants' disposable income was drastically reduced affecting their ability to acquire imported food during period of food shortage. It was therefore of no surprise when during the 99th U.S Congressional Hearings, Dr Jason Clay testified that 40% of the famine victims he interviewed attributed the famine to high taxes which was imposed on them.

Table 1. Average Tax and Contribution Paid by a Peasant in Ethiopia.

<u>Tax and contributions</u>	<u>Average (U.S \$)</u>
All Ethiopia Peasant Assoc. contribution	6.38
Land use tax	18.80
Drought contribution	75.80
Women Association contribution	1.50
Youth Association contribution	1.59
Contribution to Militia and Cadre	108.53
Local Peasant Association tax	2.25

Source: Clay, J. 1988. The Testimony of Refugees in Somalia.

It is important to note that drought in the Horn is a familiar phenomena which has occurred since immemorial and peasants have developed and adopted certain coping mechanisms like falling on communal food reserves, kinship ties and relief support. These mechanisms make them less vulnerable to famine. These mechanisms often collapsed during times of war and famine and it is this that really triggers food decline situation to a full blown famine. For instance it was recently reported on CBC news network that warring factions in Somalia have extended their counter-insurgency campaign to include the restriction of access to international relief aid, by hijacking of relief items, shelling of relief convoy and looting of relief food in warehouses. Similar incidence were also testified against rebel troops in Ethiopia during the 99th U.S Congressional Hearings on Famine and Human Rights in Ethiopia in 1985. Also Ken Menkhaus, a consultant to the U.N.O testified during a conference on Somalia in Canada on 7th October, 1992 that drought is not a factor that accounts for the recent famine in Somalia, but rather the war which is being waged in the region. He explained that food in Somalia is there not to be eaten but used as a tool to achieved political aims. A representative from the Canadian Peace-Keeping Force currently in Somalia also testified during the same conference that looting of food convoy has become rampant and this has rendered negotiation between relief agencies and war leaders very difficult, and this has accentuated the famine in the country. Such looted food are sold in neighbouring Kenya for guns.

HUMAN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A. Deaths and Health Hazards

War and famine have been the most important factors that accounted for large scale death in the Horn. Ninety percent of such deaths could be attributed to civil wars in the region. The devastating effect of civil wars and famine on human life in the Horn was so enormous that Yonas Deresa reported during the U.S Congressional Hearings (1990) that only Stalin's deliberate murder of 10 million Ukrainians by starvation and Pol Pot's Cambodia can approximate what these disasters have done to human life in Ethiopia. On a regional scale, 20% (437,460) of Wello's entire population has been either killed during the war or starved to death so far. In Tigray the number is approximately 397,000, in Wag district 60,000 deaths were so far reported by this decade (Mariam,1986). Table 3 portrays the magnitude of deaths attributed to war and famine in Darfur, Sudan. This is represented by "excess death figures" (actual minus expected death).

Table 3. Number of Deaths in Darfur, Sudan (1984-86).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Expected death</u>	<u>Actual death</u>	<u>Excess death</u>
1984	27,300	36,800	9,500
1985	40,900	126,400	85,500
1986	<u>13,000</u>	<u>13,600</u>	<u>0</u>
	81,200	176,800	95,000

Source: De Waal, A. 1989. *Famine That Kills, Darfur, Sudan.*

The magnitude of these impact drew the attention of the United State government when Herman Cohen, the then Assistant Secretary for Africa Affairs testified during the Hearing that the Ethiopia government in 1985 bombed a number of civilian targets which killed a lot of people and created famine victims of 500,000 in Eritrea, 1.4 million in Tigray, 301,600 in Wello, 122,930 in Gondar and 568,450 in Harergbe. Currently, 6-7 million people in Somalia risk death by starvation or illness due to the civil war which began in 1991. It is estimated by the Red Cross that over 2,000 - 5,000 people are dying each day in Somalia today despite relief food aid. These deaths are widespread in the central and southern part of the country. Worst off are members of the Rahanweyn and Digil clan-families in the inter-river area of Somalia. In addition, members of the riverine communities along the Jubba river are among the most badly affected. Since the overthrow of Siyard Barre, the Rahanweyn and Digil have suffered enormous due to prejuduction against them. Theirs wells have been poisoned, livestock looted and granaries emptied by armies traversing their territory. Civilian population seems to be the most affected victims of these disasters as compare with their military counterpart. Between 1980-85 a total of 566,000 civilians were killed as against 316,000 military personnel in Ethiopia and Sudan (Table 4).

Famine has also had serious health implications on the people affected. Owing to the nutritional deficiency caused by food shortage, morbidity and mortality rates have been high in the Horn. Infant mortality rates are estimated to be about 200 per 1,000 (for developed countries it is less than 20) and life expectancy rate is about 36 years (60+ in the developed countries) (Ayalew,1982).

The only comprehensive nutritional status survey on the nutritional impact of famine in Ethiopia was conducted in 1958 by the American Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense, and this survey revealed that 12% of the population often fall below 70% of the "standard weight" based on the "Medico-Actuarial Standard for Heights and Weights relation" widely used in the United States. Furthermore the survey revealed that the average daily dietary per person of approximately 2,500 calories are often reduced to 400 calories during famine period in the Horn. In another separate FAO/WHO study which covered 8 of the 14 provinces in Ethiopia, it was also revealed that the average food intake by an individual in Ethiopia during famine period is often below by 40% for protein, by 50% for carbohydrates, by 80% for vitamin A, by 60% for vitamin C and 90% for calcium.

Table 4. Civilian and Military Deaths reported in the Horn of Africa.

<u>War</u>	<u>Civilian deaths</u>	<u>Military deaths</u>
Ethiopia:		
Eritrea revolt	500,000	45,000
Ogaden vrs Govt	15,000	21,000
Sudan:		
Blacks vrs Govt	50,000	250,000
Blacks vrs Islam	<u>1,000</u>	<u>0</u>
	566,000	316,000

Source: Sivards, R.1985. 10th Anniversary Edition of World Military and Social Expenditure.

B. Refugees and Displaced Population

Another important consequence of war and famine in the Horn was the spatial dislocation of large numbers of population within and outside the boundaries of Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The political and ethnical conflicts have combined with famine to displace people as they are forced to escape death, hunger and starvation brought by these disasters. Sometimes these movements are reinforced by the government. It is worth mentioning the fact that half of Africa's refugee are located in the Horn of Africa, with Sudan having the greatest share of one million (African World Press,1988). In 1989 about 205 Sudanese refugees were in Ethiopia, 677,000

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Ethiopian refugees were located in Sudan, 430,000 in Somalia, while about 155,000 Somali refugees were scattered in Ethiopia and Sudan (African World Press, 1988).

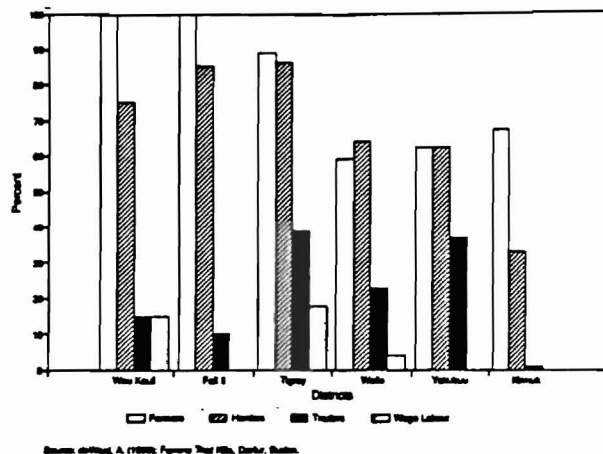
Today, large scale migration is taking place from Somalia into Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. These refugees are also prey to marauding bandits who kill them for their few possessions. Most of these refugees are young in the society, and the implication of this is that the departure of these young men from the farmland accelerated and intensified famine as the weak and the old were those left behind. Furthermore the demographical imbalances created in both the areas of origin and destination eventually became a source of numerous social problems in the region. In Ethiopia, the ratio of male:female is 115:100 during periods of normalcy, but the resultant movement that always accompanies famine and civil war after the recent famine in Ethiopia altered this ratio to 89:100. This change brings an unfamiliar situation and distorts the traditional social structure. Furthermore emigrants who arrived in large numbers in another part of the region have also created economic and socio-political problems by sparking off regional and ethnic feelings and posing potential threat by over-utilising and exhausting the potentials of the local resources. In one particular situation Steingraber (1988) reported that starving Ethiopian emigrants were killed in Sudan by the local people who wanted to protect their land reserves and resources.

C. Occupational composition of war and famine victims

While famine may be a widespread phenomena in the Horn, there is no reason for one to think that it would affect all groups of people in famine-affected region. Never had there been a situation where all occupational groups of people in a society have suffered from famine and starvation equally since different occupational groups have different commanding power over food.

In the Horn, farmers are the occupational group more affected by famine than any group. In Somalia, agro-pastoral activities are hard hit, especially women and children from agro-pastoral clans (Fig 1). Farmers are always the economic-target group in a war against any opposition. Most often, farms and farm villages are deliberately destroyed resulting in crop damages and sometime death of farmers and their household. This situation really paralyses farmers economically and psychologically. Rivalry groups adopts this approach in an attempt to cut-off the food supply to their enemies in civilian-held areas. The next affected occupational group often are the pastoralists, whose mobility unlike farmers, made them not easily traceable to be attacked. However, these disasters effect them in the form of loss of pastures and water supply for their animals as pastures and source of water are often bombed and polluted. Many livestock ranging from 20,000 to 240,000 were reported dead during the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine (Steingraber, 1988). In addition, the mortality rate for pastoral farmers was as high as 24.2 per 1,000 per year during the 1984-85 famine period although this was lower than that of food farmers which was 38.8 per 1,000 per year.

Fig 1. Occupational distribution of famine victims in Ethiopia (1984-85).



The next worst affected occupational groups were farm servants and rural labourers whose services were no longer needed due to the destruction and the fall in farm production. Next in the line of destitution were daily male labourers (household servants, water carriers etc.) in wealthy homes in the urban centres whose work was taken over by members of the clients' family. Then comes women in service occupations whose services were no longer needed during such economic crisis. The least affected occupation are craftsmen and professional beggars. Although they may be affected in some ways, beggars in particular may not significantly see any

differences between their predicament before and during famine period. This may explained why professional beggars were the least affected group.

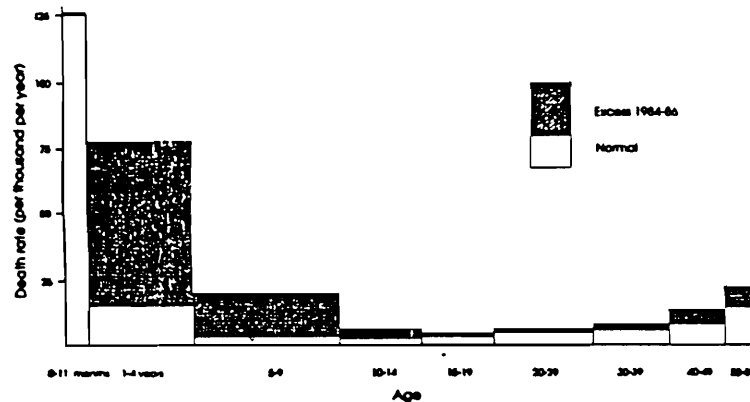
In industrial and urban centres, workers and office employees all appeared to be affected by the food crisis in the form of persistent increases in food prices which go to increase the cost of living to the urban dwellers. Inspite this, the situation of urban workers was not all that deplorable as that of the rural subsistence farmer who earns no income and peasants whose only source of income comes from the sale of their agricultural produce.

D. Age Composition of war and famine victims

By age, the degree of vulnerability to famine is not uniform in famine-stricken area. This is to say, although all categories of ages will be struck by the famine, the degree to which individuals may be vulnerable to famine may differ from age to age. Children (under the age of 4) in the Horn are more vulnerable to the effect of famine than any age group in the region. A comparison study of death rate before and after the 1984-85 famine in northern Sudan revealed that the death rates during the famine period are very high among children (De Waal, 1989). The survey revealed that in Darfur, out of the total of 3,947 death reported in 1984, 2,357 were children under 4 years old - over 50%.

In Sudan, the annual age-specific death rate of children during the 1984 famine period jumped five times from 15.7 per 1,000 to 79.5 per 1,000, thus creating an excess of over 50% (refer to Fig.2). Currently in Somalia, 25% of children under 5 years old have died. About 200 Somalian children die of starvation daily in the nation capital Mogadishu and about 20-60 died daily in Baidoa, a town 150 miles North-West of Somalia. According to a UNICEF situational report on the crisis in Somalia, about 350,000 children have already have fallen victims in 1992 alone to the war and famine in Somalia, whiles another 750,000 are at risk (source: electronic mail received from the Office of the Secretary-General, U.N.O.).

Fig.2 Excess deaths by age category.



This high death rate in children may be attributed to the fact that children have the lowest threshold of vulnerability and they are the first to suffer increase mortality and the last to return to normal after the famine. Curtis (1988) maintained that about 40-50 infants below the age of 4 died monthly in Ethiopia during the 1984-85 famine period because their mothers ceased to be lactiferous. During the 1985's Hearings it was also reported that about 1,000 Ethiopian children were starved to death during the same period. It is also important to note that the smaller proportion of children under 4 years was not only due to the high mortality rate but also due to the low fertility rate which might be caused by the high incidence of amenorrhoea, anovulation, sexual abstinence and separation of spouse which are important characteristics of famine victims.

In adults (15-49), excess death rate was not as significant as compare with that of children as shown in Table 7 and Fig 2. This might be due to the fact that adults were mobile in search for food for themselves and in addition, most of them were conscripted to the army where they had easy access to regular food, while the few who did not find themselves in the army were able to endure physically, the pinch of the hunger. The aged (60+ years) on the otherhand, experienced substantial number of deaths. The high death rate (an increase of 100%) recorded in this group may be attributed to the physically weakness of this group members. This situation made them easily susceptible to famine-related diseases.

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E. Gender vulnerability and composition of war and famine victims

By sex, famine and civil war in the Horn have a great impact on women than men. These impacts can be explained in a social sense. Men are less vulnerable to the effect of famine because most men are drafted into the army or into the ranks of guerilla fighters, a situation which always make it possible and easier for them to have easy access to food by resorting to looting and hijacking of relief items. The dimension of women's crises during war and famine period includes growing burden and violence in the domestic homes and relief camps, attacks on their civil status, restricted mobility, increase dehumanization and sexual objectification of women as well as sex tourism and prostitution abetted by the government concerned to generate foreign expenditure to meet growing expenditures (Gita et al, 1987). For instance, high incidence of rape and sexual assault of Wello women in Ethiopia were reported during the 1984-85 famine. These are orchestrated by armed gangs. Most women were also reported to have suffered from sexual related diseases due to the assaults. In one instance, a victim of sexual assault was quoted by Steingraber (1988) as saying "the fighters divided 205 women in my camp and raped us, they rotated us for two months".

Furthermore the burden of famine fell exceptionally on women since in the Horn, women are the main agricultural producers and constitutes a substantial part of the agrarian work force. Women perform the task of planting, hoeing and harvesting while the men only clear and fell trees. Consequently, the bareness of the land and food shortage due to the devastating effect of war and famine will have a high magnitudinal effect on woman than men. Furthermore, in the domestic homes the women's task becomes onerous. For instance wells and streams ran dry and landscapes are stripped of trees during such disaster period, and women being principal drawers of water and collectors of fuelwood for the family will be forced to search further and further afield for water and fuelwood. This can take several days. Also, when it comes to migration in search of food, the physical mobility of women is restricted. While, men depart in search of food in the cities and even abroad, women generally remained behind, with the children and the aged as well as themselves to look after.

Famine can also be seen as causing the intensification of a system of gender subordination and exploitation that was pervasive in the daily life of the people in the Horn. It is a customary requirement that priority should be given to the feeding of the male members of household so as to ensure the continuance of the male line (Arnold, 1988). Females are expected to sacrifice their food and ultimately their lives to enable their husbands and sons survive. Females therefore receive smaller and poorer share of the food, and this is even made worst during famine period in the region. It is undisputable fact that war and famine have imposed enormous physical and emotion suffering upon women in the Horn, which can be described barely as a converted form of female infanticides and gender discrimination.

Conclusion

The combination of these lethal disasters - war and famine - have done so much harm to the Horn. They account for the impoverishment of the region and accentuate the development of the underdevelopment of the region. Farmers, children, the aged and women have been hardly hit by these disasters which merit careful planning to ameliorate the suffering of these group of people.

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