

Testimony by Michael Bowers

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East Africa's Quiet Famine

Introduction

Good afternoon. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important, timely hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to join this panel and hope that my testimony helps bring more attention to the increasingly dire levels of food insecurity in the region and underscores the need for urgent action.

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization that specializes in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programs. We operate in more than 40 countries around the world, including throughout the East Africa region and in all four countries considered at risk of famine in 2017. At Mercy Corps, we believe that a better world is possible. Our team of almost 5,000 people around the world work to put bold solutions into action, help people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.

Famine Warnings

Global Context

Although we are only focusing on East Africa today, it is important to first recognize how dire the global context is. Seventy million people in 2017 are projected to need emergency assistance based on known threats to food insecurity. **Particularly disturbing is that the threat of famine is the highest it has been in decades.**¹ A famine has already been declared in parts of South Sudan, and looming threats of famines in Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen have put an estimated 20 million people – more than the entire population of New Jersey and North Carolina combined – at risk of starvation in 2017. Approximately 1.4 million children are at imminent risk of death without immediate action by the international community.² With needs this high, we are deeply concerned that the President's FY 2018 budget request, if enacted, would slash humanitarian and development assistance and hamstring the U.S. -- and in fact the global response -- to this crisis, with tragic results. For example, if Congress enacted the President's request and Food for Peace and the Emergency Food Security Program were cut by 31%, approximately 13 million hungry men, women and children, would lose access to lifesaving food assistance. At a time when needs are growing exponentially, this request is not only irresponsible, but undercuts America's humanitarian leadership role in the world.

Regional Context

The current drought in the Horn of Africa is more intense and widespread than in 2011, and is the primary driver of food insecurity in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. Although severe drought is playing its part, these are not just natural disasters. The regional situation is instead made worse by man-made causes³ which includes a deadly mix of conflict, marginalization, displacement, violent extremism, and climate change. Moreover, insufficient investment in conflict prevention and management, resilience and

¹ <http://www.fews.net/global/alert/january-25-2017>

² https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94893.html; https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/world/africa/why-20-million-people-are-on-brink-of-famine-in-a-world-of-plenty.html?_r=0

³ <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/18/opinion/sunday/that-food-saved-my-life-and-trump-wants-to-cut-it-off.html>

sustainable development activities allows these problems to fester, extending these crises unnecessarily. Within the region, the capacity and ability of the individuals countries to respond varies. While all could soon become overwhelmed depending on if/when rains fail, it is also important to note that Kenya and Ethiopia are in far better positions to respond because they are proactively responding to early warnings and current needs.

These massive multi-country humanitarian crises will have far-reaching impacts on security and stability in already volatile regions of Africa. Besides the tragic human costs, refugee flows are increasing. For example, approximately 1.5 million refugees have fled South Sudan since the conflict erupted, with the refugee population in Uganda more than tripling in the last 6 months alone, climbing to 698,000 by the beginning of February.⁴ These crises are stretching the already-overwhelmed humanitarian system, almost to the breaking point.

In the Horn of Africa, 12.8 million people are severely food insecure. To address their needs, \$1.9 billion was requested in the UN OCHA report published in February 2017, “Horn of Africa: A Call for Action.”⁵ As the chart below demonstrates, based on the current rate of donor response to humanitarian appeals, the global community is falling dramatically behind in responding to massive humanitarian needs.

Chart 1: East Africa 2017 appeals and response plan funding progress currently tracked by the UN:⁶

Country/ Region	Required	Funded	Percent Funded
Global	\$20.8 billion	\$3 billion	14.2%
Burundi	\$73.7 million	\$15.2 million	20.6%
Djibouti	\$43 million	\$1.2 million	2.7%
Ethiopia	\$948.6 million	\$62.5 million	6.6%
Kenya	\$165.8 million	\$.3 million	.2%
South Sudan	\$1.6 billion	\$303.2 million	18.5%
Somalia	\$863.5 million	\$249.5 million	28.9%

While the immediate priority must be saving lives, **building resilience and addressing conflict and violence cannot wait**. As the international community, national governments and local responders mobilize to respond, we ask that the US Congress simultaneously:

- Provide urgently needed assistance and remove obstacles to humanitarians accessing populations in need – especially diplomatic obstacles;
- Invest in building the resilience of vulnerable communities to prepare for, withstand and recover from shocks and stresses; and,
- Address the root causes of conflict and violence.

⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2017/2/589dba9f4/number-refugees-fleeing-south-sudan-tops-15-million.html>

⁵ <http://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-call-action-february-2017>

⁶ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2017> as of Friday, March 24, 2017 at 12:00 pm.

South Sudan

South Sudan is a prime example of how, when left unaddressed, long-term conflict can produce devastating consequences. After decades of conflict with Sudan, South Sudan experienced a brief moment of stability post-independence before conflict broke out once again in December 2013. Since then, tens of thousands of South Sudanese civilians have been killed and the ongoing civil war has forced more than 3 million people to flee their homes.⁷ “Which home? I left it 2 years ago and have been running since then, always hungry and afraid,” a 20 year old mother of 4 shared with our team. Over 1.5 million people have fled to neighboring countries, including to Uganda (which is now hosting the largest refugee population on the continent), Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Central African Republic, with the latter two countries managing displacements from internal conflict as well.⁸ After more than three years of war and repeated warnings about the deepening of the crisis in South Sudan, we now have one final chance to prevent a famine from spreading and engulfing more than one million people.

Of the many humanitarian needs within the country, the magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition experienced by South Sudanese is unprecedented. Despite fertile land, conflict has made it impossible for farmers to tend their fields.⁹ To make matters worse, militias have been accused of intentionally destroying crops, looting cattle, burning homes and villages, and damaging vital water sources.¹⁰ Currently, almost 5 million people are without enough food (IPC Phases 3-5), and of that some 100,000 people are on the brink of starvation.¹¹ If nothing is done, by July 2017, it is projected that the number of people without adequate access to food may reach 5.5 million.^{12,13}

Horrifyingly, one in four South Sudanese children under the age of five is already stunted due to malnutrition and is especially vulnerable to the effects of constrained food consumption.¹⁴

Somalia

Somalia has been ravaged by decades of conflict and insecurity, making access to many parts of the country difficult. When overlaid by multiple years of failed rains, the effect is catastrophic – as we saw in the 2011 famine that killed nearly 260,000 people.¹⁵ This year, rains have failed again – and we have seen the tripling of water prices, the wiping out of crops and the death of livestock. Three million two hundred thousand people are in need of water, sanitation and hygiene services (WASH) and nearly half of the populations are in need of food security assistance.¹⁶ Hundreds of thousands of children face acute malnutrition and potentially starvation. The Government of Somalia declared the drought a natural disaster at the start of March after 110 people died within 48 hours within the Bay region.¹⁷ Unless a massive and urgent scale-up of humanitarian assistance takes place, famine could soon be a reality in some of the worst drought-affected areas of Somalia.

⁷ <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan>

⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2017/3/58cbfa304/refugee-crisis-south-sudan-worlds-fastest-growing.html>

⁹ <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/famine-south-sudan-understanding-food-insecurity-unity-state>

¹⁰ <https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/03/20/south-sudan-needs-peace-much-food>

¹¹ <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-news-detail/en/c/471308/>

¹² <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-map-detail/en/c/471270/>

¹³ <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/famine-in-south-sudan>

¹⁵ <http://www1.wfp.org/countries/somalia>

¹⁶ <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/humanitarian-action-children-2017-somalia>

¹⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/05/somalia-prime-minister-110-dead-hunger-past-48-hours-drought/>

Over the last two years, Somalia has seen increased refugee returns (both UNHCR supported and spontaneous returns) from the neighboring countries, primarily from Kenya (Dadaab). As of March 15, 57,329 Somali refugees had returned home since December 8, 2014, when UNHCR first started supporting voluntary return of Somali refugees in Kenya. UNHCR supported 17,359 in 2017 alone.¹⁸ The conditions in many parts of Somalia are not conducive to mass refugee returns due to ongoing conflict, insecurity, and humanitarian conditions that have now been exacerbated by the worsening drought and possible famine, leading to further internal and external displacement of the local communities and returnees.

Kenya

The Government of Kenya declared the drought a national disaster early in February. The drought has caused widespread crop failure and water shortages, increased levels of hunger and malnutrition, threatened livelihoods -- particularly of pastoralists -- and caused rising rates of communicable disease. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled from 1.3 million people in August 2016 to 2.7 million in February 2017. Close to 175,000 children are not attending pre-primary or primary school.¹⁹ There is a critical nutrition situation in Turkana North, North Horr in Marsabit, and Mandera, indicating malnutrition rates in communities that fall within the IPC Phase 5 classification. In Marsabit county alone, the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) measurement is 31.5 percent and the water distance increase is 240 percent. An NGO partner operating in Turkana reported GAM rates of 55%.

Ethiopia

In addition to recovering from lingering effects of the 2015-2016 El Niño-drought, the lowland pastoralist areas are now contending with the impacts of a new drought. The government of Ethiopia continues to support 7.9 million Ethiopians through the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) with the help of partners. Despite these efforts, 5.6 million people will require emergency food assistance in 2017. An additional 2.7 million children and pregnant and lactating mothers will need supplementary feedings, 9.2 million people will need help accessing safe drinking water, 1.9 million will need livestock support, and 300,000 children will need to be treated for severe acute malnutrition.²⁰

Mercy Corps Response

Saving Lives Now

Across the region, Mercy Corps is working with our local partners to quickly deliver food, water, sanitation supplies, hygiene promotion, health care, and education in emergencies.

For example, over the last year in South Sudan in Unity State, we provided 80,000 people with emergency water and sanitation (WASH) services. Just a few of our activities between October and December of 2016 included treating and distributing potable water to 41,500 individuals, rehabilitating 32 boreholes, and helping respond to a cholera outbreak. While we appreciate the strong support of donors like the US, we also use private funding from concerned individuals. Through private funds, we are distributing crop and vegetable seeds, fishing nets and agriculture tools so that people get an option to grow their food and rebuild their lives. Where appropriate, we try to provide cash assistance that allows families to buy the items they need most while supporting and stimulating local markets and businesses. Since the declaration of the famine, we have scaled up our response in the counties which are at

¹⁸ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/54715>

¹⁹ <http://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-call-action-february-2017>

²⁰ <http://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-call-action-february-2017>

heightened risk of famine in order to not miss this last chance to save lives, yet we are barely scratching the surface of the need.

In Somalia, Mercy Corps is using private funds to rapidly bolster ongoing WASH and livelihoods programming while also responding to the increasing levels of food insecurity. Without this programming, families are forced to drink unsafe water that leads to high risk of waterborne diseases. In addition, with OCHA funding we are providing water and emergency wet-feeding to 21 schools in the central regions of the country that have been most severely affected by the drought. This not only saves lives, but ensures access to education for over 4,000 school children and the continued operation of schools systems that would have otherwise closed due to the worsening drought conditions.

In Ethiopia, we are responding to the drought with OFDA and OCHA funding for commercial destocking project that provides income sources to households, protects the livestock assets of pastoralists, preserves deteriorating rangeland, stimulates market linkages between traders and producers, and supports the market prices of livestock. So far we have helped nearly 10,000 cattle, are gearing up to destock about 22,000 more livestock, and are serving over 24,000 families. We are also working to treat malnutrition in Somali region.

In Kenya, to date, there has been little donor funding released for the emergency response to the drought or help to bolster the efforts of the Kenyan government, which is doing what it can. What funding exists for the drought response has, in large part, been private funding. We have been able to do little in response to the drought, other than some limited water trucking and water infrastructure work. If we fail to respond now, we risk a much larger and costly emergency response later, with too many lives lost in the meantime.

Humanitarian Access

More funding is needed urgently to continue these responses, but humanitarian access in conflict zones is also a concern as aid workers continue to be killed, injured and harassed. Without the safe access to deliver food, water and vital supplies, especially in areas which are on the brink of starvation, we will not be able to save lives.

According to the UN, at least 67 aid workers have been killed by warring parties in South Sudan since the conflict erupted in 2013.²¹ For example, in Unity State in South Sudan, famine has already been declared but humanitarians are currently unable to enter the areas in direst need and serve the worst-affected communities due to security concerns. In fact, after the famine declaration, about 28 humanitarians were evacuated from Mayendit county in Unity state, which is a famine-affected county. And just over a week ago, an NGO's attempt to provide aid was disrupted as the team of 8 was abducted for 3 days (the abductors wanted food and other aid supplies). Unless the guns fall silent and conflict stops, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate. *"I still want to believe God is there, but based on what I have faced my patience and faith is running out,"* 19-year-old Julia told our rapid response team.

Securing access for the humanitarian response should be a top priority. More than ever, we need safe and uninterrupted humanitarian access. The international community needs to act now as the world cannot miss this chance to prevent catastrophe. Peter, a 30-year-old father of 5 grieved, *"I have lost everything, my house was burnt, everything looted and I do not know how to rebuild my life (you are doing very good work, all our blessing are with you)."* We cannot turn a deaf ear to Peter and Julia.

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/south-sudan_en.pdf

The difference access makes on mitigating famine risks can be seen when comparing the constraints in South Sudan and Somalia to the proactive responses of the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia to the drought. The levels of food insecurity and malnutrition are sobering, but would even worse if they were not allowing the most vulnerable to be reached and contributing their own resources to the response.

Money is needed urgently

I was in Kenya as the impacts of the 2011 drought unfolded in Somalia and witnessed the consequences of ignoring early action. Looking at Kenya now, I am concerned we could repeat the same mistakes. While conditions in Kenya are not as overtly desperate as in other parts of the Horn, now is the time to double down on prevention activities that can help mitigate the drought's impacts on vulnerable populations. As a Feed the Future Focus country, the U.S. has helped contribute to those gains, including a 14 percent decline in the prevalence of child stunting in part of the Feed the Future target area in the country between 2008 and 2015.²² The lack of rapid, preventive intervention now is placing at risk the gains made.

Some donors are already committing (or reprioritizing) large tranches of funding to provide this immediate life saving response. But funding is not being made available across the region, and what is available needs to be scaled up dramatically in the next days and weeks, not months. Not only do we need more pledges, we need more funds immediately going directly to those with access to the most vulnerable. Even if funding arrives in two months, the human cost of that delayed funding is too high.

Building Resilience now and in the Future: Prevention at Work

Considering the level of need, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. We at Mercy Corps though are pushed to action. And we continue to find evidence that our efforts to save lives and reduce poverty are having positive, sustainable impacts.

Besides the responsibility of saving lives now through humanitarian aid, I would like to stress to this subcommittee the fact that **we can prevent and mitigate food security crises**. It's also extremely cost effective: a study by the British government in Kenya and Ethiopia estimates that every \$1 invested in resilience will result in \$2.90 in reduced humanitarian spending, avoided losses and development benefits.²³

To improve food security in the region, Mercy Corps has been implementing a variety of programs to strengthen a community's resilience to drought and other effects of climate change. New evidence from a USAID-funded Mercy Corps program in Ethiopia confirms what academic experts and aid groups already know: **food security resilience programs help communities survive crises and stop the cycle of recurrent humanitarian disasters.**

As mentioned earlier, in 2015-2016, one of the strongest El Niño cycles on record resulted in the worst drought Ethiopia has experienced in over 50 years.²⁴ At its height, more than 10 million people required food aid. In the midst of this crisis, Mercy Corps sought to measure the impact of its resilience activities under the Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) program.

²² <https://feedthefuture.gov/progress2016/>

²³ https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/032217_Gottlieb_Testimony_REVISED1.pdf

²⁴ Using measures such as water shortages, crop losses, and livestock mortality. FEWSNET (2015, December 4).

PRIME is a five-year USAID Feed the Future project implemented by Mercy Corps²⁵ and designed to improve the lives and enhance resilience of pastoralist communities in Ethiopia's drought-prone drylands in Afar, Oromiya and Somali regional states. Begun in 2012, the project works to strengthen market systems to benefit poor and vulnerable households, and reduce their risks to the effects of drought and other natural disasters.

Researchers evaluated PRIME's impact on households' ability to cope and recover from the drought in the hard hit regional state of Somali²⁶ by collecting data from four *woredas* (districts) that compared 500 PRIME beneficiary households with more than 1,000 comparable households from similar communities not targeted by the program.²⁷

PRIME beneficiary households were better off than their neighbors in multiple ways.

- *More Food Security. Less Food Insecurity:* Households in PRIME target communities had a more diverse diet, consuming nearly one additional food group per day. This indicates that the program improved income and/or access to markets to enable purchase and consumption of more nutritious foods even during an acute crisis.
- *Greater Wealth, Lower Vulnerability to Poverty:* PRIME interventions had a positive impact on households' ability to maintain important assets (including livestock) and avoid impoverishment in the face of the drought. The asset values (a proxy for wealth) of households in the program were 1.4 times higher than those of the comparison group. Households supported through PRIME were also four percentage points less likely to be at risk of being under the poverty line.
- *Better Animal Health, Fewer Livestock Losses:* Compared to the non-targeted households, PRIME beneficiaries were able to maintain healthier herds despite the severe drought conditions. They were less likely to experience animal deaths, and in particular were able to protect their breeding females, a critical component of a healthy and resilient herd. The lower animal mortality rate suggests that PRIME's support to veterinary care and animal markets allowed households to avoid losing weakened livestock.

This study demonstrates that innovative, long-term resilience programs like PRIME can help mitigate the worst effects of humanitarian emergencies and protect important gains in development goals such as child nutrition, maternal health, and economic growth and stability in vulnerable communities. Over the long-term, this type of multi-year, systematic approach creates households, communities and ultimately countries that are more self-sufficient and better able to respond and adapt when faced with crises.

And PRIME continues to be a part of the response to drought in Ethiopia. While continuing to provide veterinary products and helping governments make use of climate information, it is also providing cash transfers via mobile phones that will impact 12,500 people. This helps them open bank accounts, connecting people to financial institutions and introducing a culture of savings as people are provided financial literacy, in addition to proper nutrition practices.

²⁵ Mercy Corps works on PRIME in partnership with the Aged and Children Pastoralists Association (ACPA), Action for Integrated Sustainable Development (AISDA), CARE, Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD), Haramaya University, Horn of Africa Voluntary Youth Committee (Havoyoco), Kimetrica, and SOS Sahel.

²⁶ Approximately 1.4 million people were estimated by the Ethiopian Government to be food insecure in this area, well above the five-year average and even greater than the previous drought in 2010-2011.

²⁷ The comparison group was matched to PRIME participants such that they were statistically similar - the only difference was whether or not they had benefited from PRIME. Using data from the African Flood and Drought Monitor, our research was able to control for levels of drought exposure, so that any differences observed between the two groups could be attributed to the program.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Even as we respond urgently to the crisis in the East Africa, we must continue to invest in opportunities to build communities' abilities to cope with shocks and stresses in the future. By helping these communities deal with risk, we can save lives from future famines and reduce the need for costly humanitarian investments over the long-term.

This innovative resilience approach to food security was also embraced by Congress last year when the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) was passed. I have to take a moment to thank Chairman Smith for his leadership and being the original sponsor of the House bill and thank the rest of the Committee for their help in passing this important bill into law so that we can continue to build and support more programs that deliver similar, powerful impacts.

PRIME is funded by the Development Assistance account. Feed the Future programs funded by this important account are exactly the type of programs we imagine the Chair and Congress want to see develop with the implementation of GFSA. Unfortunately, if the President's budget request for foreign aid is not rejected by Congress, these gains and innovative programs would not be able to continue.

Hunger is Complex; Solutions Must be Multi-Sectoral

In addition to Feed the Future, **non-emergency Food for Peace Title II programs are absolutely critical to building the resilience of families and communities to food insecurity.** While Feed the Future countries tend to be in more stable countries, Title II non-emergency programs are essential in staving off food crisis in some of the more fragile and complex countries. For example, the Karamoja region of Northern Uganda has been racked by war, nearly continuous raiding and neglect by the central government for decades. Sitting at a strategically important nexus between Kenya and South Sudan, cattle raiders from both countries continue to steal cattle and threaten the livelihoods of pastoralists and farmers in the regions. Further, while maternal mortality rates in Uganda are some of the worst in the world, with a ranking of 37 of 184, Karamoja has particularly high maternal mortality rates as well as the highest child mortality rate (under 5 deaths) of 72 per 1,000 births—more than triple that of Uganda's capital, Kampala. These factors are a dangerous combination that could not only drag down the economic potential of the region, but also risk exacerbating inequality and, if left unaddressed, increase instability.

In partnership with Food for Peace, Mercy Corps is implementing a five-year \$26 million Food for Peace "Non-Emergency" program, called Northern Karamoja Growth, Health and Governance (GHG). The program is addressing the complex drivers of food insecurity in the region, including through a range of economic, health, governance and peacebuilding initiatives that will build a foundation for broader self-sufficiency, while targeted food aid for pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two. Mercy Corps works through a 'market-systems' approach that analyzes markets beyond basic supply and demand principles; instead, looking at how they are influenced by behaviors, government regulations and rules, relationships, and the environment to understand why markets do not work for the poor. This approach then facilitates structural or 'system' changes that increase the the ability of vulnerable populations to participate in markets and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Lessons from this program are helpful for Congress to consider when thinking about breaking the cycle of famine and food insecurity. For example, last year, a drought in the Northern Uganda caused 60% of the crops to fail. With poverty rates of 51% percent--74% in the North East subregion alone--buying food was already difficult for vulnerable families and their children.²⁸ While some traders were starting to raise prices on commodities- in effect price gouging- Mercy Corps worked with traders to keep the price of commodities low. Using smart subsidies for transportation and storage, we partnered with traders not

²⁸<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/381951474255092375/pdf/Uganda-Poverty-Assessment-Report-2016.pdf>

interested in price gouging and taking advantage of a drought, and were able to further lower their costs, keeping the price low of commodities they were selling on the open market. Other traders had to follow suit as their commodities were overpriced, causing the price of commodities to stay affordable. Poor families throughout the region were able to continue to purchase food on the market, despite the drought.

These type of interventions are smart, cost-effective and have far reaching effects. Food for Peace has been an essential partner in fostering these types of interventions. Title II non-emergency programs have proven time and again that multi-year, flexible funding enables programs to address hunger within complex, interrelated systems effectively.

Fighting Violence and Conflict

Conflict directly and indirectly impacts hunger across East Africa. Not only do we need to address conflict where it is happening, but we also need to mitigate potential spillover effects that could further stress resource strapped neighboring countries and further exacerbate food insecurity. This is why Mercy Corps enhances the capacity of people and institutions to prevent and manage conflict. For example, Mercy Corps' programs in East Africa are working cross-border to mitigate cattle raiding, a major cause of conflict and resource loss for families. Through our USAID-funded program PEACE III, where we partner with PACT and local organizations, we are working with 'reformed warriors' to better integrate them into society and ensure they don't pick up arms again. As one example, Peter Acia, a warrior since he was 19, was a fierce fighter known by names like "Tetiamoi," or "one who kills all enemies." Working with PEACE III, he is now a "Peace Ambassador" and part of a support group of reformed warriors. Through the program Peter has benefitted from trauma healing sessions, trainings on peace building, entrepreneurship and life skills. Once a feared fighter, he now owns a small shop in Kaabong, Northern Uganda.

Policy Recommendations

We can and should do better as a global community in responding now to address the urgent needs. Congress has an integral role to play in helping prevent the spread of famine and create conditions that mitigate food crises from happening in the first place.

Funding

Specifically, Congress must:

- Prioritize funding in the FY 2017 omnibus or CR to aggressively respond to these crises and prevent the next crises from happening. Cuts or recessions to the FY 2017 CR levels for humanitarian and development cuts would be devastating to the response and should be fought at all costs.
- In FY 2018, Congress should fully fund the International Affairs 150 Account at no less than \$60 billion and ensure the 302b allocations for the State Department and Foreign Operations and Agriculture Appropriations bills are robust enough to respond to these growing crises and continue investments that mitigate against future crises.
- Within the appropriations bills in FY 2018, Congress must provide adequate funding for humanitarian and development accounts, including:
 - \$3.4 billion for International Disaster Assistance;
 - \$1.8 billion for Food for Peace, including no less than \$350 million for non-emergency programs;
 - \$3.6 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance; and
 - \$3.3 billion for Development Assistance and \$4.32 billion for Economic Support Fund Accounts which provide funding for Feed the Future and other critical programs.

These funding levels will ensure the U.S. can continue to lead the response and works with other donors to make sure they are also adequately contributing. Funding will:

- Provide immediate resources to respond to humanitarian needs and avert mass starvation and death
- Support development programs to build resilience, improve food security and mitigate the impact of disasters, both within the emergency response and by continuing to support community-led development wherever possible

Resilience and Peacebuilding in the midst of emergency response

The US government should continue to invest in programs that address the root causes of conflict and violence at all levels. The US government should also utilize a resilience approach to development when possible by enabling interventions to respond and stay relevant to rapidly changing conditions and needs, provide multi-year funding (like the 5 year Title II non-emergency programs), and allow for flexible, iterative program design.

Diplomacy

Both bottom up and top down diplomatic efforts are urgently needed to stop the man-made crisis in South-Sudan. In addition to local conflict prevention and management efforts, diplomacy and negotiation are desperately needed. The US and key allies should provide high level support to:

- Ensure quick and peaceful resolution to the conflict;
- Guarantee humanitarian access and ensure the safety and security of aid workers; and,
- Address governance, inequality and development issues that drive conflict and violence and support longer-term peacebuilding

Conclusion

Congress has considerable power and responsibility to help address these extremely critical problems.

I will close by referring you to the addendum I am including with my testimony. This piece, published in the Guardian in December 2016, is written by Deepmala Mahla, our country director in South Sudan. She illustrates the consequences of not changing how we respond in South Sudan. She reminds us that we can and should do better, in South Sudan, and in all our responses to crisis. Twenty years from now, when we reflect upon our collective response to this emergency, we want to be able to conclude that we did everything to save lives, and even more, we did everything we could to turn this story of malnourishment and starvation into one of recovery and development.

Thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to answering your questions.

Addendum 1

Published in the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/dec/07/aid-in-south-sudan-were-mopping-up-while-the-tap-is-still-running>

Aid in South Sudan: We're mopping up while the tap is still running

Even the most experienced humanitarians are being ground down by the violence and short-termism in South Sudan

Written by: Deepmala Mahla, South Sudan country director, Mercy Corps
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In September, South Sudan joined a club where the fees are exorbitant and no one really wants to be a member. Along with Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia, it became one of the countries that has produced more than a million refugees.

We all know the story. The birth of South Sudan in 2011 brought with it such hope and promise. But now, engulfed in a deadly and bitter conflict fuelled by a power struggle leading to ethnic-related violence, hope is dying and the future looks bleak.

At Mercy Corps the way we view the world is to find opportunity in crisis. But, for the first time in my career, I am finding this tough. The people of South Sudan are resilient, but with the number of people needing support to feed themselves and their families having doubled over the last year (now at 4.8 million) and most indicators of development on a downward spiral, it is difficult to identify the positives. And the truth is that although the war is at the heart of this crisis, short-term donor strategies and funding, crippling bureaucracy and a peace deal that the international community is holding on to, but which many South Sudanese have lost faith in, are all playing their part in making the situation worse.

No one is denying that conditions in South Sudan are gruelling. We work in a tense situation of ongoing conflict and violence trying to deliver aid to the most vulnerable. And while the fact that my team's lives are on the line day in day out, is concerning to me as their country director, it is not what is keeping me awake at night. Our profession comes with certain risks, which we knowingly accept. As aid workers we are trained to manage and implement programmes in times of conflict. We do this responsibly and sustainably, so that despite the fragility of the environment, we can move people along the road from relief to recovery.

But in South Sudan, we are not able to do this and it is this that grieves me. Just to begin with, we are suffering from diminished humanitarian capacity in the country, after the surge in violence in July, many humanitarian and institutional staff left and are yet to return. Moreover, while the NGO community perseveres in continuing to share best practice and recommendations for programmatic responses – both for urgent relief and medium term recovery – we are consulted only occasionally by donors on their strategies despite our rich on-the-ground experience and knowledge of what communities want and need.

For example, NGOs implement more than 70% of all programmes in South Sudan, but yet the main support from state actors is provided through pooled funding. What this means is that money is firstly put into a common pot, and from there it is donated to NGOs. This is not only an expensive way to operate, but it slows down implementation. Donating direct to NGOs would be more efficient, especially as there is no shadow of a doubt that the needs of South Sudanese people are exigent and cannot wait.

However, the most pressing concern affecting recovery is that the vast majority of our funding is received in short tranches: a couple of months, a couple of months and then another couple of months. What this means is that we are unable to plan long-term and nothing is guaranteed. We establish our programme, hire staff, implement for perhaps five months, and then wind down the programme again. We may (or may not) receive more funding for that programme, and so we start the cycle all over again. This is the reality in which we are working. We can do better.

In July, Mercy Corps with support from the British government began implementing a programme to stimulate economic recovery in some of the most inaccessible areas in Unity state. This is a four-year programme, virtually unheard of in the recent times in South Sudan. We are providing cash transfers to

households and traders to kick-start market recovery, as well as provide business training and livelihoods support for fishing and farming. It is precisely this type of programming that allows us to work sustainably in a manner that builds capacity and ultimately, enables the project to be taken over by the community. It is also more cost effective as we can plan efficiently, procure smarter, recruit better, and engage communities more meaningfully.

We cannot say that our programmes will not be interrupted by violence and conflict, but should this mean that we surrender all hope to help the South Sudanese people move forward beyond urgent relief and handouts? No. It means we adapt, we change our way of thinking and working. It means that donors become more flexible in their approach and understand that when there is an uptick in violence we will need to pivot from our recovery programmes to urgent relief, and then when we can, back again. Around the world, Mercy Corps has implemented programmes with such nimbleness to shift between relief and recovery to fit the context, it requires trust, partnership, and commitment.

Without this change in approach, I will not be surprised if more international organisations leave South Sudan, or scale back their operations in the next six months. While we must have a peace deal that is firm, assuring and definite, that ensures the protection of civilians as well as aid workers, we also desperately need donors to reinvest and recommit to the future of South Sudan.