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### **Famine in Somalia: Reforming International Humanitarian Emergency Response System**

Somalia, a country located in the Horn of Africa, has been noted by the international community for its chronic pirate issues and disruption to the social order in Somalia as a result of the devastation stemming from the perpetuated civil war since 1991. Due to its proximity to the equator, the climate in Somalia hinterland is typically hot and arid.

Unfortunately, a grievous and widespread famine occurred in mid-July 2011, when it was estimated tens of thousands of people died prior to the declaration of the famine - the last time a famine was declared by the United Nations was three decades ago (Pflanz, Mike). This famine was said to be the most terrible one in 60 years (Mike Wooldridge). A dramatic increase of 240 percent in red sorghum price arose in Somalia, and 2.6 million people required humanitarian assistance (OCHA). An urgent emergency meeting, gathering heads of UN agencies was held on 12 July. After the meeting, United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon emphasized, "The human cost of this crisis is catastrophic. We can not afford to wait." However, as the world's largest humanitarian aid agency, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) announced its first relief flights took off on 26 July, which implies no emergency measures were adopted for exactly 2 weeks (Mvunganyi, Jackson).

Because of sluggish reaction to the worst drought in 60 years, an estimated of 260,000 Somali famished people starved to death needlessly, half of whom were under age of 5 (AP). According to a report conducted by the UN and the US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network, 4.6% of the total population and 10% of children under five died in southern and central Somalia. In Lower Shabelle, 18% of children under five died and in Mogadishu 17%. Rudi Van Aaken, the deputy head of the Food and Agriculture Organization operation for Somalia, said about half of the casualty were there before the famine was declared by the UN (BBC News). We can regard the high toll in this way - if adequate action had been taken, 260,000 people could have been saved. In this case, the quantity and rapidity of foreign aid dominate where a crisis moves towards and the destinies of people suffering from starvation.

In 2011, World Food Programme supplied 54% of global food aid, from which 100 million people in over 70 countries benefited (WFP). To demonstrate the current situation of international emergency response, I would like to introduce the operational system of WFP, from the initial receipt of the emergency report, to the ultimate delivery of WFP aid. When the government of stricken area seeks help, WFP will gather data or maps within 24 hours. An emergency operations centre will be established and first deliveries will be coordinated within 48 hours. Within 1 week, WFP will buy food needed for relief operation, launch international appeals for food, set up agreed aid transport channels, and design comprehensive emergency operations. Eventually, within 3 months, regular distributions can be organized in stricken area, as well as a monitoring system for distributions. I believe the 3-month lasting period of mounting aid is too long for those who are in extreme hunger,

women and children can not tough out the starvation before aid are widely delivered. Too much time is squandered on appealing for donations and purchasing food to mount its response.

As no effective measures are currently being taken to accelerate the reaction, the existing international humanitarian emergency response system remains constant. The invariable system leads to more and more avoidable deaths, more than 70,000 Somali refugees fled into Kenya by August (the Guardian). Since people suffer from a natural disaster or conflict and are unable to resolve or alleviate current crises, emergency aid to the most vulnerable ones has always been performed as the initial action. Foreign aid is absolutely not the ultimate way to resolve the crisis. Nevertheless, the currently and temporarily incapable ones are in urgent need of aid to rescue them from death. Furthermore, foreign aid provides foundation to the rehabilitation and normal development process. For instance, the Food and Agricultural Organization rehabilitated 594 kilometres of irrigation canals (UN News Centre).

To further examine the immense gap between starving people outside refugee camp and already protected people in camp, I have investigated life in refugee camp of Somali people. First, I have discovered the typical family size in Somalia. There is the extremely high infant mortality of 103.72 deaths per 1000 live births (CIA). Additionally, children are regarded as gifts from god in Somali culture (Robin Ann Narruhn). A woman's social status can be enhanced through having more children. A Somali family is typically composed of 5 members - father, mother, and 3 children, the elderly are rare as a Somali is only expected to live for 50.8 years (CIA). However, this family size is under normal circumstances - when a famine strikes things will be different. For example, during the aforementioned drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011, as a "family" trudged dozens or hundreds of miles to reach refugee camp in Kenya, commonly children and elderly members had died and the so called "family" was fragmentary, leaving the routes known as roads of death (AP).

About typical family life in refugee camps, the World Food Programme provides basic while insufficient food and shelter from UNHCR. As for the education system, almost all state-run primary schools were shut down when the civil erupted. However, most children are eligible to attend primary schools in refugee camps when they are six, though most of them must drop out by the eighth year (Azad Essa). Primary medical healthcare system is established by NGOs,. For example, IMC provides daytime emergency treatment, delivery and neonatal care services (IMC). Certainly, refugees will lose their original pastureland (most Somali people lead a nomadic way of life because of the arid climate) or jobs. Youths often battle as there are extremely limited jobs available in camp, while refugees are also not entitled to seek jobs outside camp (Jaya Vadlamudi). Since refugees are ineligible to work or possess any pastureland, it's meaningless to discuss the major barriers to improve agricultural productivity or employment and earning a living wage. Their living standard dominantly depends on the scale of foreign aid.

There are other major issues impeding foreign aid in Somalia, especially corruption, obstruction created by extremist militants, cumbersome procedure of refugee status registration, and ignorance of advance warning. According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia's report, massive corruption diverted half of the World Food Programme aid, and WFP paid two or threes times above market rate to transport contractors. Though WFP emphatically denied the allegation that half of the aid was diverted from the needy, as well as the accusation which indicated that three contractors in Somalia

received 80 percent of WFP food aid transportation business (WFP's statement)? It is an undeniable fact that widespread corruption exists in Somalia, a great amount of grain selling in Somali markets are WFP food aid, which should be distributed to refugees (Matt Brown).

Obstructions created by religious extremist militants can not be neglected as well. Al-Shabab, an Islamic rebellion group, once won Somali people's support and controlled southern and central part of the country including the capital Mogadishu when it first emerged, as it promised people security to this constant war-zone. However, the group rejected UN's declaration of famine in 2011, accused it of political propaganda, and banned agencies from delivering aid to al-Shabab controlled areas. Simultaneously, they curbed the exodus of men from leaving the region, causing its credibility to collapse (AP). Additionally, Al-Shabab advocates the Saudi-inspired Wahhabi version of Islam, while most Somali believe in Sufis. The destruction of Sufis shrines initiated by al-Shabab further outraged Somali people. In February 2012, al-Shabab joined al-Qaeda, al-Shabab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane said he "pledged obedience" to al-Qaeda head Ayman al-Zawahiri in a joint video. Fortunately, the UN-backed government, established in September 2011, has seized control of cities and towns with the help of African Union military forces, and therefore not likely to hinder aid distribution, despite al-Shabab frequently carries out suicide attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere (BBC News Africa).

For those who trudged to Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, the world's largest refugee camp, their lives were still not protected. The newly arrived ones had to endure a 10-week-long wait for registration. Meanwhile, they were ineligible for full food packages until they were recognized as refugees (Mike Pflanz). During this period, the unregistered could be supplied for at most 36 days, which means those who were waiting to obtain refugee status would not be supplied for 5 weeks. What they can only do is to calculate cautiously for daily food ration in spite of suffering from malnutrition (Mike Pflanz).

As a matter of fact, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network had anticipated the crisis in August 2010, but nothing was done until the crises escalated and horrible images from drought-stricken areas appeared on news programmes. Politicians in developed countries grudging taking preventative actions because they thought the warnings exaggerated the severity of the problem. Local governments were embarrassed to be aided, suggesting that they were incompetent to handle domestic issues. Some organizations were prone to deal with, rather than prevent, an emergency. If they effectively nipped the crisis in the bud, they might be accused of "crying wolf" (Suzanne Dvorak).

It is under these circumstances that I propose to reform the international humanitarian emergency response system through collaborative efforts of United Nations, non-governmental organizations, national government, corporations, and the typical families in the following aspects:

Fundamentally, the local government and international community should pay enough attention to advance warning received from various international warning systems. An active cooperation between warning agencies and news media is required. Media and press should be encouraged to cover the current situation in latent drought areas and disseminate the warning, while typical families are supposed to seize this chance to awaken the external world to their trouble. Free and unimpeded standing communication channels between United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and various warning agencies are needed.

I do believe numerous types of natural disasters and conflicts are predictable. As for natural disasters, drought is absolutely foreseeable. A drought can never be formed in a few days, but a long period of poor rainfall. This natural phenomenon will lead to gradual decline in various crops' production, and it can be reflected as inflation of food prices. Meteorologists can be fully alarmed by the reduction of precipitation compared to the average level of former years. Meteorological satellites can also provide direct evidence to forecast a potential drought. All the above are information which local governments and the international community can utilize. Therefore, actions definitely can be taken prior to the disaster actually taking place. As for armed conflict, disturbance and a storm of protest, they are usually an omen for a revolution. Armed conflict may breakout if a diplomatic crisis exacerbates. UN estimates that every US\$1 spent on preventing the crisis will save \$7 in fixing the problem. A valued advance warning can also enable the emergency response more rapidly. Furthermore, the most important and beneficial effect is that inestimable people's lives will be saved in this case.

World Food Programme is supposed to expand warehouse capacity as much as possible. Too many cases recommitted the same error that first aid are in a tiny amount in virtue of limited storage capacity. The newly built core warehouses should be in close proximity to airports, while secondary warehouses are supposed to be adjacent to ports or motorways. WFP occasionally tended to transport food aid by sea rather than air, owing to the considerable expense. I believe it's undoubted that WFP should function in an economical way. Nevertheless, the act of avoiding expense must, under the circumstance that regular and sufficient distribution has been achieved and as long as gap of demand and supply exists, be that aid are supposed to be airlifted to stricken areas if possible - I believe this should be recognized as a principle.

Actually, efficient transport infrastructures are not available in many cases. In this condition, food aid as cash will be more preferable to donated commodities. Concurrently, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia should be empowered to supervise the money use. There have been reports that the donated free non-reimbursable commodities are devastating local market. In consideration of further economy rehabilitation and development, I also propose World Food Programme and various NGOs to aid in money, and "sell" the donated commodities in markets at a reasonable price. WFP may investigate the first cost in cultivating staple food and negotiate with local merchants and corporations to set an equitable price. In this way, the prohibitive food price in local market will be undercut by the formidable WFP commodities. If the price in local market is fair as well, or too low, the WFP commodities will stabilize prices at a reasonable level, at the meantime, interests of indigenous farmers and merchants will be respected.

After examining the World Food Programme operations in this famine, I discovered there has already been an extremely popular and successful initial experimental project running with a similar innovative idea - the Food Vouchers Programme. People are provided with \$80 of vouchers per month to purchase food from 13 registered local traders in the first phase of project. The flexible voucher gives people more choices to balance their nutrition, and boosts local economy (WFP News). WFP is currently planning to expand this project to broader areas and larger groups of people. In my opinion, WFP may also "marketize" the donated product in the

way of my above-mentioned idea and let people choose from it, as marketization has been proved as the most effective economic operation mechanism. I believe this measure will significantly boost the efficiency of donation use.

Evidently, the last-mile problem exists in the food distribution process. The aforementioned corruption phenomenon is rampant among local government officers, transport contractors and even World Food Programme staff. The argument between UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and WFP brought disgrace on the reputation of the United Nations. Yet we can recognize that contradictory interests exist between the Group and WFP, the Group is indeed monitoring WFP's execution system. I suppose that the international community can utilize this conflict of interest and realize the checks and balances between the Group and WFP. The Group can be empowered to supervise WFP behavior in the entire process of soliciting and delivering aid. I also propose for the Group to dispatch a team to every distribution site to counter any forms of corruption. NGOs are encouraged to join the team as well. The Monitoring Group may establish corruption-reporting channels via telephone, internet or mail, so that local families can offer testimony and evidence to the Group as they witness corruption.

For those who are waiting outside refugee camp to register, they should be constantly supplied with emergency food aid to subsist. The safety measure of vetting every refugee in case of paramilitary groups infiltrating the camp is legitimate and sensible, yet camp-running staff are to distribute food aid outside camp. Otherwise, the starving unregistered ones are at risk of death stemming from the "safety measure". I believe it is humanitarian even if paramilitary group militants are aided.

It is possible for United Nations, Somali government and various countries to realize a rapid international emergency response system by 2015. Plenty of measures are practical, efficient, and most importantly - available. This problem is not like other complex international issues, the determining factor is how we value it. Developing a global partnership is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Once the international community is conscious of its importance, cooperation will soon be promoted and the response system can be modified. The previously mentioned recommendations markedly embodied the thought of wide-ranging cooperation. Not only United Nations and various governments, but also NGOs, corporations and local families - all of them play different roles in implementing the recommendations.

In summary, tardy response has led to countless miserable cases. We must recognize the defects of current system, which can not be neglected. Various institutes that send out warnings shall interchange with media and press free of impediment, stimulating local government and the international community to implement preventive actions. The World Food Programme is supposed to constantly expand warehouses capacity and store up sufficient food. So long as sufficient aid distribution is not regularized, emergency aid is to be airlifted to afflicted areas or in cash if possible, and respect the legitimate interests of local farmers and merchants. To ensure every donated grain distributed to the most starving and vulnerable ones, NGOs should be encouraged to join the UN Monitoring Group in Somalia, free and secured corruption-reporting system is supposed to be established. While refugees are waiting to be registered, emergency food needs to be distributed outside camp. By reforming the

international emergency response system, a prodigious amount of aforementioned subsistence families may survive the disaster and determine their prospective destinies in the future.

As a Chinese saying goes, “车到山前必有路“ (*chē dào shān qián bì yǒu lù*), which means “ the cart will find its way round the hill when it gets there.” It essentially means that things will eventually sort themselves out. No matter how complex the problem is, moreover, this is not a relatively complex problem, and it will be solved once the international community collaborates to deal with it. Firmly I believe that a rapid international emergency response system will form in the near future.

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