

**BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)  
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)**

**RESPONDING TO DROUGHT THROUGH NON-FOOD  
INTERVENTIONS - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Cyclical droughts, such as those currently affecting the Horn of Africa, negatively impact the humanitarian situation among poor populations. Insufficient access to water is the most commonly identified consequence of drought, resulting in shortages of water for human and animal consumption, agriculture, and pasture rejuvenation. As a drought worsens and these shortages become prolonged, alleviating the direct negative impacts of the situation on health, food security, and livelihoods of people living in affected areas becomes the primary objective of humanitarian interventions. The following discussion provides illustrative examples of non-food humanitarian response options in drought situations.



Pastoralists often lead livestock long distances in search of water in drought-affected areas. (Photo by Ngoc Clark)

**WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE**

The objectives of water, sanitation, and hygiene programs in drought situations include providing water for human consumption, preventing related outbreaks of water-borne illnesses such as typhoid and cholera, and supporting water sources for livestock consumption as a means of protecting livelihoods. Examples of these activities include water source rehabilitation or construction, water tankering, and community water management activities.

**NUTRITION**

As drought conditions become prolonged, food security deteriorates among affected populations. Whether as a result of reduced agricultural yields at the household level or decreased time available for food-related activities as the search for water becomes most important within a household, the nutritional intake of all members of a household is compromised. In many cases, the provision of general or supplementary rations is crucial to mitigate against a widespread nutritional crisis. When these rations become insufficient in quantity or nutritional diversity, additional targeted nutrition interventions are required. USAID/OFDA interventions include providing technical assistance, supporting feeding programs, and funding training and capacity-building activities.

**HEALTH**

As children become increasingly malnourished, they are at increased risk from morbidity and mortality associated with common communicable diseases. Children under five years of age, pregnant women, the elderly, and individuals in ongoing nutrition programs, including those with HIV/AIDS, are at particular risk. The lack of access to health services and water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities can further aggravate the transmission of communicable diseases, increase mortality from maternal and neonatal complications, potentially resulting in diseases of epidemic significance such as cholera and typhoid, and further increase maternal and neonatal mortality. As a result, USAID/OFDA supports technical health assistance, surveillance and early warning systems, and both prevention and treatment of common causes of morbidity and mortality.

## AGRICULTURE

Subsistence farmers in developing countries are strongly dependent on rainfall for agricultural activity. For these families, crop production, rather than an income-generating activity, is the primary means of feeding their families throughout the year. As a result, drought conditions of any magnitude can impact household food security. Several consecutive years of drought can lead families to sell assets such as tools and animals in order to purchase basic necessities. Examples of USAID/OFDA-supported agricultural interventions in response to drought include seed distributions, seed fairs or voucher systems, and agricultural technical assistance.

## LIVESTOCK

A significant number of vulnerable households in drought-affected areas of Africa are pastoralists or agro-pastoralists, with a majority of their livelihoods and food security dependent on livestock. As conditions deteriorate in pastoral lands, livestock are unable to find sufficient fodder and they begin to weaken and die from malnutrition or disease. As a result, livestock prices fall and grains prices rise, leaving pastoralists unable to purchase what they need from the sale of their animals. It is important to consider the number of animals a region can support when evaluating destocking or restocking programs in response to drought. Based on such considerations, USAID/OFDA may support destocking and restocking, animal health programs, and provision of water for livestock.

## ECONOMIC ASSET SUPPORT

In drought conditions, USAID/OFDA uses a livelihoods-based approach as a means to improve food security. Vulnerable families undertake a variety of subsistence, economic income-generating, and coping mechanism activities in order to ensure food security at the household level. The combination of these activities and the use of existing social, human, and physical assets is known as the collective livelihood of the household. USAID/OFDA recognizes that a variety of factors contribute to the inability of a family or community to successfully combine these activities to achieve food security. Family members may spend increased time searching for water in lieu of participating in agriculture or herding activities. Households may lose labor assets as family members become too sick or malnourished to work. Individuals may sell productive assets such as tools, livestock, seed, or kitchen utensils as a result of previous or current drought. Diminished environmental assets, such as decreased grazing pasture, also impact household livelihoods. USAID/OFDA addresses the range of factors that affect livelihoods through multi-sectoral interventions, combining asset protection activities with health, nutrition, and water and sanitation programs. Specialized economic asset support interventions include livelihood fairs and alternative income activities.



USAID/OFDA drought response programs address food security, water, and livelihood needs through multi-sectoral interventions, such as this community project to build a new water catchment area. (Photo by Ian Moise)