

## East Africa Drought Solution Runs Deep

The work that CRS has been carrying out in the Horn of Africa for more than 50 years is paying off in this drought. Specifically, during the past 8 years, CRS—with generous funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.N. Office for the Coordination of International Affairs, and donations from concerned Catholics and others of goodwill—has helped fight the effects of recurrent droughts. However, one thing is clear: **The current situation is dire and lives are at stake.**

The East African drought of 2011 that is hitting Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia so hard is proving to be one of the worst in 50 years. Extreme hunger is rapidly becoming a harsh daily reality for more than 11 million people in East Africa because of what many are calling the worst drought in decades. This severe lack of rainfall has resulted in failed crops and critical shortages in food and water. Further compounding this natural disaster are drastic increases in food prices and an influx of refugees from Somalia who have fled to seek food.

Suzanna Tkalect, Catholic Relief Services, is assisting Bishop Giorgio Bertin of Djibouti and Somalia. She reports that in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya about 50 miles from the border with Somalia, an average of 2,500 people arrive every day; 80 percent are mothers with young children.



Women collect water in a region of Ethiopia where CRS has been working on drought mitigation projects since 2003. Photo by KL Dammann/CRS

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us the Christians cannot be indifferent to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people starving in the Horn of Africa. "It is inadmissible to be indifferent in the face of the tragedy of the hungry and thirsty," the pope said, after reciting the Angelus July 31 with pilgrims gathered in the courtyard of the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo.

When Jesus fed the multitudes by miraculously multiplying loaves and fishes, he gave his disciples an example to follow, the pope said. "He encourages us to give them something to eat and to share bread with the needy. Following Christ, we must be sensitive to people's poverty," he said.

Bekele Abaire, CRS water and sanitation program manager, reports, "When people hear the word *drought*, they automatically assume that there is no—or very little—water in an area. And while it is true that we're dealing with the aftermath of poor rain seasons, the truth is that there is water," he says, "There is a solution to this problem of recurrent drought that has left millions to face severe hunger. The challenge is that the water runs below the surface in underground caverns as deep as 1,000 feet. This water is difficult but not impossible to access."

"Catholic Relief Services has brought in rigs to drill wells 1,000 feet into the earth. A recent visit to the field revealed that 95 percent of 28 wells we've constructed are still operational," Abaire says. "These sites were built to serve up to 5,000 people in any given community, but we're finding that the need is so severe that up to 10,000 are now flocking to these water points."

CRS continues to support emergency response efforts in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. CRS is leading a program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development that involves working with nine other humanitarian organizations to distribute food. The reach of that effort is expanding from 400,000 to 1 million beneficiaries. CRS is working with Caritas Ethiopia to identify other critical needs. In Kenya, CRS and partners are responding to the needs of the Somali refugees and their local hosts, who are themselves suffering because of the drought. CRS also is responding through many ongoing water, sanitation, and agriculture projects in Africa.

### **How you can help:**

- Please pray for the people of East Africa.
- Donate to the East Africa Emergency Fund; checks payable to Catholic Relief Services can be sent to the Office for Social Concerns, 197 East Gay St., Columbus, OH 43215 – write "East African Fund" in the memo section
- Learn more: contact the diocesan CRS director at 614-241-2540 or [ecordle@colsdio.org](mailto:ecordle@colsdio.org); and visit: [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org) for continuous updates on our response.