



D J CLARK / FOR CHINA DAILY

Halwa Ali (left) collects water with a neighbor at a nearby pond dug as part of a government food for work initiative at Abdi Roba village, Fedis District, Ethiopia. The dirty brown pond is the Ali family's only water supply.

Family's fight to stave off hunger

Editor's note: This is the second part of a series on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa. D J Clark stayed with a local family in Ethiopia to share their experiences in getting food.

By D J CLARK
FOR CHINA DAILY

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — At 6 am Shartu Abdulla Ali leaves her home in Fedis, Ethiopia, to walk 12 kilometers to the local market. Her mission is simple: to sell enough firewood, packed on the back of the family donkey, to pay for a meal to feed her family of seven before the end of the day.

Waiting back in the village with their five children, Ali, 12, Kima, 8, Halwa, 14, Fio, 9, and Mohammed, 4, Shartu's husband Gabriele Abdulla Ali explained the family predicament. "I was born here as was my mother and father and my grandparents. My family has always lived around this area. None of my family has ever faced the situation we now find ourselves in. There used to be plenty of rain, and we did not have to work hard to get a crop to eat. These days we work hard but still we can't grow enough crops. We don't know why."

The Ali's neighborhood does not look like a district with a food shortage. Tall sorghum plants surround the small mud homestead giving the impression of lush green bountiful farmlands, but Fedis is currently Ethiopia's most food insecure dis-

trict, according to the World Food Programme (WFP).

"One of the major issues in Ethiopia is population pressure on the land, and some of the farm holdings are quite small," said Lynne Miller, deputy country manager of the WFP in Ethiopia. "This means the food they produce does not entirely support them for the full year. It is also the fact that there is more than one harvest in a year which they rely on to carry them through, and it is possible to have one good harvest at one point but not to get the next harvest."

The Horn of Africa has suffered its worst drought in 60 years. Although the seasonal rain is starting to arrive in Ethiopia, 4.5 million people still rely on direct food aid to survive, according to the UN. The first of a series of Chinese food shipments was expected to arrive in Ethiopia on Monday to help the local government deal with a shortfall of food aid. "Fifteen kg of cereals per person per month is our ration rate in Ethiopia, and the Chinese aid will help fill the gap we have so it is timely and important for our beneficiaries," said Tadesse Bekele, deputy director of Disaster Risk Management in the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture.

Inside the Ali's house a cow lives

side by side with the family. "It is our insurance policy," Gabriele joked with me as he explained that they kept it inside to ensure its well-being.

"Right now we don't have any food in the house. We have crops around us as you can see, but these crops only supply us food for a very short time and if it does not rain two or three times in the coming weeks we will lose these crops too. For now we are relying on our trips to sell firewood until we get the next food donation from the government. If this fails we will sell the cow to keep us going to the harvest."

The seasonal rains that were due last month were much less than forecast and the water resources for the area are depleting quickly. Halwa, Gabriele's 14-year-old daughter, took me on a 10-minute walk to a large muddy pond Gabriele and his neighbors dug as part of a government food for work initiative. The dirty brown water is the family's only water supply for washing, cooking and drinking. The pond is already almost empty, just a few weeks after the rainy season. "We add purifying tablets the government gave us before we drink it," Gabriele explained as we returned with four large containers. "When this runs out we have to walk to another village half an hour away. If that runs out we have to walk three hours to the nearest water."

The lack of rain has put the price of food up in the local market, adding to the difficulty in accessing the food. In the local town where Shartu is selling the firewood the markets are buzzing with activity with no shortage of food on sale. Miller said that food security is more often about the ability of farmers to access the food than its availability.

As the sun was about to set, Shartu returned home from her six-hour roundtrip walk clutching a bottle of oil, some gasoline and a bag of maize. She immediately began the preparations for the evening meal as her youngest son Mohammed clutched her skirt. The mood around the house quickly lightened as the children began to play, relieved that they would eat today. In spite of the hardship, both Gabriele and Shartu feel secure within the government safety net. "We put our trust in the government," both told me in separate conversations.

Since the Ethiopian famines of 1973 and 1984, the country has built infrastructures that enable them to work closely with international humanitarian organizations to both predict and deal with food crises as they arise. The Chinese donation, though only a part of a much larger international aid effort, will allow families like the Ali's to remain secure in the homes for the foreseeable future.

UN official: Beijing can help fight poverty

By LI LIANXING
AND ZHANG YUNBI
CHINA DAILY



Helen Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Program

BEIJING — China can play a rebalancing role in the current global financial crisis to combat future global poverty, a senior United Nations official said on Monday.

Helen Clark, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) administrator, said one of the greatest challenges to eliminating poverty is to avert a global recession.

"China's domestic demand needs to go up to rely less on exporting. In the rebalancing, China has to import more," she said.

Clark also said China's successful experience in development and lifting people out of poverty could be shared with other less developed countries, although there is not a "Beijing Model" to export.

To combat poverty, multilateral platform is vital. The UNDP has to have a good relationship with traditional donor countries in the development system. "The development is not just about money ...

and dollars. It's about sharing experiences," she said.

"As China strives to achieve even more impressive human development outcomes through its renewed emphasis on the quality of growth, it will also be setting an example for the world," she said.

Inclusive growth is vital in reducing poverty, inequality and human development, such as stimulating the economic sectors where the poor work to generate employment, investing in infrastructure and services in the areas where the poor live and, in particular, increasing access to safe water, sanitation and reliable energy in those areas.

"Although there are rich natural resources in some countries ... little money or profit goes back to local economy," she said, adding that the government should use growth for human development purposes.

"So many countries with rich resources failed in explorations and turning them into human development. We have to see this as great



NAVESH CHITRAKAR / REUTERS

A child living in a slum plays on a swing under a bridge, while the world commemorates the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, on the bank of Bagmati River in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Monday. China has done a good job in poverty reduction both at home and abroad by lifting millions of people out of poverty and sharing its experiences with other poor countries.

wealth for future human development, rather than a curse," she told China Daily.

"In this respect, developed and developing countries have a big possibility to cooperate with each other," she added.

She said the UNDP is working closely with China to share good practices on poverty reduction and the experiences of expanding opportunities and reducing inequality. It will work with the Chinese government to promote social inclusion for migrant workers and their families, and to enhance women's inclusion in the labor market.

Clark came to China to attend the 2011 Global Poverty Reduction and Development Forum, which was hosted by the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development of China and the UN System in China. It is the fifth time that this global annual event has been held in China.

Clark said that while enormous progress has been made globally, particularly in East Asia, nearly a quarter of the world is missing out on the benefits and that 1.44 billion people are still living on less than \$1.25 a day.

FM calls for direct talks in sea disputes

By MA LIYAO
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — China on Monday reiterated its stance of resolving disputes in the South China Sea through talks between nations that are directly involved.

Multinational talks will not help and may make the issue even more complicated, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said at a daily press meeting.

Liu's remarks came after Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gema proposed a multilateral framework to settle maritime disputes in the South China Sea during a tour of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries.

China has always been against resolving the disputes under a multinational framework. Japan, which is not in the region and has no claim over the South China Sea, is not the first country to propose this process to solve disputes.

The Philippines opposed the latest China-Vietnam joint statement on the second day it was issued and called for a multilateral approach, rather than a bilateral agreement, to resolve disputes concerning the South China Sea.

Having long-standing disputes over sovereignty of part of the South China Sea, China and Vietnam issued a joint statement last week as Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong visited Beijing, reaffirming their political will to settle maritime issues through negotiations and friendly consultation.

"The fact that China and Vietnam have agreed to settle maritime disputes through negotiations has nothing to do with a third party," Liu said, adding that the joint agreement is important for guiding the long-term healthy and stable development of bilateral relations

and reflects the determination and will of both countries to properly handle disputes.

He also called on other countries to respect nations within the region that "are making efforts to solve disputes through bilateral talks and negotiations".

The Philippines also has some overlapping claims with China over some islands and reefs in the area, which cover more than 3.5 million square kilometers and are believed to hold vast deposits of oil and natural gas.

"China-Philippines maritime disputes can only be resolved through direct negotiations between China and the Philippines, a stance the Philippines is quite clear about," Liu said.

Alongside disputes over the South China Sea, China also has overlapping maritime claims over the East China Sea with Japan.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said on Sunday in a speech at a Japanese Air Self-Defense Force base north of Tokyo that the national security environment of Japan "has grown increasingly murky due to China's stepped-up activities in local waters and its rapid military expansion, along with North Korea's (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) repeated militaristic provocations".

Asked about Noda's speech, Liu said that China's national defense growth and military modernization are completely in line with the country's needs of maintaining national security.

"As a country that has a population of 1.3 billion and long coastlines, it is reasonable for us to develop our defense strength. It is not targeting any specific country," he said.

Shen Mingchun and Xinhua contributed to this story.

Romney's attacks on currency and trade 'irresponsible'

By ZHENG YANGPENG
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — The Foreign Ministry said on Monday that attacks by leading US Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney on Chinese trade and currency practices were "irresponsible".

Romney last week threatened trade sanctions against China if the world's No 2 economy does not halt what he claimed was currency manipulation, unfair subsidies and rampant intellectual property theft.

Romney's tough stance came as he has sought to stake out differences with President Barack Obama and tap into the US public's rising concern over China's economic and military growth.

"We think that that sort of frequently blaming others, looking for scapegoats and even misleading the public is an irresponsible attitude," Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said at a regular news conference.

China has achieved economic success over the last few years because it was brave enough to face challenges and improve itself by liberating minds, opening up and seeking win-win results, he added.

In September, Xinhua news agency called Romney's similar remarks on the value of the yuan an "absurd" attempt to play on US voter fears.

The former Massachusetts governor is leading the field of Republicans seeking the nomination to run against Obama in 2012.

"It's brilliant politics even though it's bad economics," The

Wall Street Journal quoted economist Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise Institute as saying. "It allows him to be a saber-rattling guy who can appeal to tea-party types in the primaries while not alienating people who vote in general elections."

In an effort not to lose ground in debates with Romney and other vocal presidential candidates, Obama said China has been "very aggressive" in "gaming the trading system to its advantage and to the disadvantage of other countries". He made the remarks before the Republican-controlled Senate voted on legislation to penalize China for its currency policy.

The debate has become so heated that Republican presidential hopeful Jon Huntsman, a former US ambassador to China, said he backs the Senate bill even though he warns that "slapping penalties" on China could ignite a trade war.

The majority of responses from the Chinese Internet sphere dismissed the US politicians' attacks as an "old trick".

"We don't have to pay too much attention to what politicians said. They are just boasting of their quarrels to others," commented a netizen nicknamed Jim1987. "Once one becomes the president, he should view things with an overall perspective."

China has repeatedly said that the yuan's value is not a cause of imbalances in the world economy, and that it is committed to the gradual reform of the exchange rate as part of broader reforms to boost domestic consumption.

Reuters contributed to this story.