

SOMALIA: FAMINE'S

AFTER YEARS OF DROUGHT, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF KIDS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA ARE FACING STARVATION

FAST FACTS

AREA: 246,201 sq mi

(U.S.: 3.7 million sq mi)

POPULATION: 9.9 million

(U.S.: 312 million)

PER CAPITA GDP: \$600

(U.S.: \$47,200)

RELIGION: Sunni Muslim

LANGUAGES: Somali (official), Arabic; many Somalis also speak Italian and English

LITERACY: males, 50%; females, 26% (U.S.: 99/99)

LIFE EXPECTANCY: males, 50 years; females, 53 years (U.S.: 75/80)

**BY CASSANDRA NELSON
IN MOGADISHU, SOMALIA**

The bones poke out of 9-year-old Firduz's skin as she lies in a crowded government hospital. Because there are no beds or chairs, nearly every inch of floor space is covered with children suffering from severe malnutrition. Many are near death.

Banadir Hospital is in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia (*see map, pp. 14-15*). This impoverished country in the Horn of Africa has been without a functioning government since civil war broke out in 1991. Since then, tens of thousands of people have died from violence, starvation, and disease. This year, a prolonged drought and failed crops led to a famine. According to the United Nations (U.N.), 4 million Somalis face dire food shortages.

Before the famine, Firduz lived with her family in the countryside. But more than two years of drought killed their cattle and left them without drinking water or milk, one of their main sources of nutrition.

"We had to drink old water from a dirty pond that the cows drank out of," says Firduz. "My sister



and I started to get sick. One of our neighbors died from the bad water."

After hearing on the radio that food was being distributed in Mogadishu, the desperate family set out for the capital. "We left our house with only the clothes we had on," Firduz tells JS.

Words to Know

- **anarchy** *(n)*: political and social disorder due to the absence of a functioning government
- **cholera** *(n)*: a disease, often fatal, that causes dehydration, lack of appetite, and diarrhea
- **infrastructure** *(n)*: the basic facilities and services of a country, including power plants, transportation, and schools

YOUNGEST VICTIMS



Children in a Mogadishu refugee camp have limited access to food, clean water, and medical care.

The family walked for 16 days, on increasingly sore and bloody feet. They slept on the ground without shelter. Along the way, farmers gave them small amounts of food. Armed rebels tried to rob them, but the family had so little that the rebels simply let them go.

Upon reaching Mogadishu, the family settled in a camp for displaced people. When Firduz got diarrhea and became weak—signs of **cholera**—her worried mother took her to the hospital. No one knows how long Firduz will have to stay there.

Somalia is one of the world's most dangerous countries. When its government collapsed in 1991, feuding warlords and militants overran the streets. After two decades of **anarchy** and civil war, much of Somalia's **infrastructure** *continued on p. 12* →



This child was recruited to fight for Al Shabab.

Left: A main street in Mogadishu bears the scars of conflict.

Right: Al Shabab forces are a fearsome presence in many Somali cities.



has been destroyed. With no education or work, many people, kids included, have turned to violent crime or joined militant groups.

Pirates off the Coast

Somalia's lawlessness has led to the rise of piracy on the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. Pirates have kidnapped crews and passengers, extorting millions of dollars in ransom and, in some cases, murdering their hostages. This year alone, as of late October, Somali pirates had hijacked 24 ships, taken 400 hostages, and killed 15 of them.

Since 2006, a militant Islamic group called Al Shabab has gained control of much of Somalia. With links to Al Qaeda, Al Shabab has become a major recruiter for Islamic terrorists worldwide, including in the U.S. In October, a 22-year-old from a Somali community in Minneapolis, Minnesota, blew himself up in an

attack on African peacekeepers in Mogadishu. He is the third known American to have been recruited as an Al Shabab suicide bomber.

Somalia's transitional government has little influence outside of the capital. A small force from the

could cause 750,000 more people to starve to death. Yet much of the world seems to have become numb to Somalia's endless conflicts. The U.N. says that it has raised less than half of the \$2.4 billion it needs to help starving Somalis.

“ I worry about the gunfire at night, but not as much as I worry that someone will . . . force me to fight with Al Shabab. ”

African Union has also been powerless to stop the chaos and violence.

This turmoil has displaced 1.5 million people—15 percent of Somalia's population—within the country. Another million Somalis have fled to neighboring countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia.

The U.N. recently warned that the famine engulfing Somalia

Part of the problem is that many people wonder whether donating money will help. Warlords, rebels, and even government soldiers routinely seize shipments of food from aid organizations.

Some help is getting to displaced people in nearby nations and in parts of Somalia. The U.S. alone has given more than \$500 million



In a camp for displaced Somalis, a girl collects rice from an aid group.

The U.S. & Somalia

U.S. officials say that chaos in Somalia represents a security threat to the region. Al Shabab could also strike at targets around the world. This has led the U.S. to invest in a military base in Ethiopia. From there, Al Shabab fighters are targeted with armed drone aircraft. The Pentagon has also approved \$45 million in arms for African Union troops.

But Americans are wary of intervention in Somalia. In 1993, 18 U.S. soldiers protecting food aid were killed by rebels in a Mogadishu street battle. Their bodies were dragged through the streets, an incident dramatized in the film *Black Hawk Down*. The U.S. quickly withdrew its troops.

“People remember what happened in the 1990s,” a U.S. official told a reporter. “‘It doesn’t work’ was the conclusion.”

for famine relief. But Al Shabab won’t allow Western aid groups into areas it controls, even to inoculate children. Dozens of aid workers have fled because of death threats, and some have been kidnapped or killed in recent years.

Life in the Camps

Most of Somalia’s displaced people, like Firduz and her family, end up in refugee camps. In Mogadishu, more than half the population lives in makeshift shelters. Families are crammed into tents and lack access to clean water or sanitation facilities. Improper waste disposal is causing food and water contamination and spreading disease.

“Living in a camp is really difficult,” says Bashir, 12. “My little sister is sick with cholera, so my parents spend most of their time at the hospital with her.”

Bashir is responsible for getting food for the family. Every day, he and his older sisters walk to a food distribution center. The lines are long, and often they’ll just get a

bowl of rice. If they’re lucky, they may get some beans or vegetables.

Security in the camps is also a big concern. In recent months, dozens of young people have been killed or injured in attacks. An estimated 1,000 to 2,000 children, some as young as 9, have been forced to serve in Al Shabab units.

“I worry about the gunfire at night, but not as much as I worry that someone will come and take me away and force me to fight with Al Shabab,” Bashir says.

Firduz and Bashir still hope for a brighter future. In October, the rainy season began. Rain will help speed recovery from the drought. The two young people are eager for that day, when they can return home and resume their normal lives. ●

➔ Think About It

1. What are some of the reasons helping Somalis is so difficult?
2. What is life like for kids in refugee camps there?

MapSearch

AFRICA: Signs of Progress

Although Africa as a whole still faces enormous challenges, signs of progress can be seen in many of the continent's 54 nations. Here are some examples:

- As part of the Arab Spring movement that swept many Muslim nations in the Middle East and North Africa this year, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya have ousted longtime dictators, and Morocco has instituted democratic reforms.
- Six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies of the past decade are in Africa: Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique, and Rwanda.*
- Wider access to technology—especially cell phones—is having a dramatic effect on local economies, allowing people to find jobs, the best prices for crops, or even the cheapest fertilizer.

After looking at the map, answer the questions below.

* SOURCES: International Monetary Fund; *The Economist*

Questions

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Which country hosted the World Cup in 2010?
2. What is Somalia's capital?
3. How many of the past decade's 10 fastest-growing economies are in Africa?
4. Which capital is located at 10°N, 14°W?
5. About how many miles separate the capitals of Angola and Zambia?
6. Which two capitals sit across the Congo River from each other?
7. Which Arab Spring countries recently overthrew dictators?
8. South Africa contains which two countries within its borders?
9. Which body of water lies to the north of Libya?
10. How do you think the spread of new technology helps economies grow?

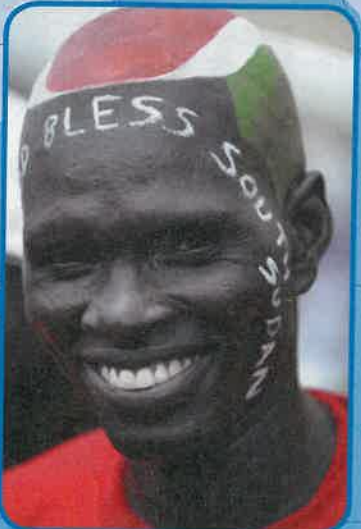
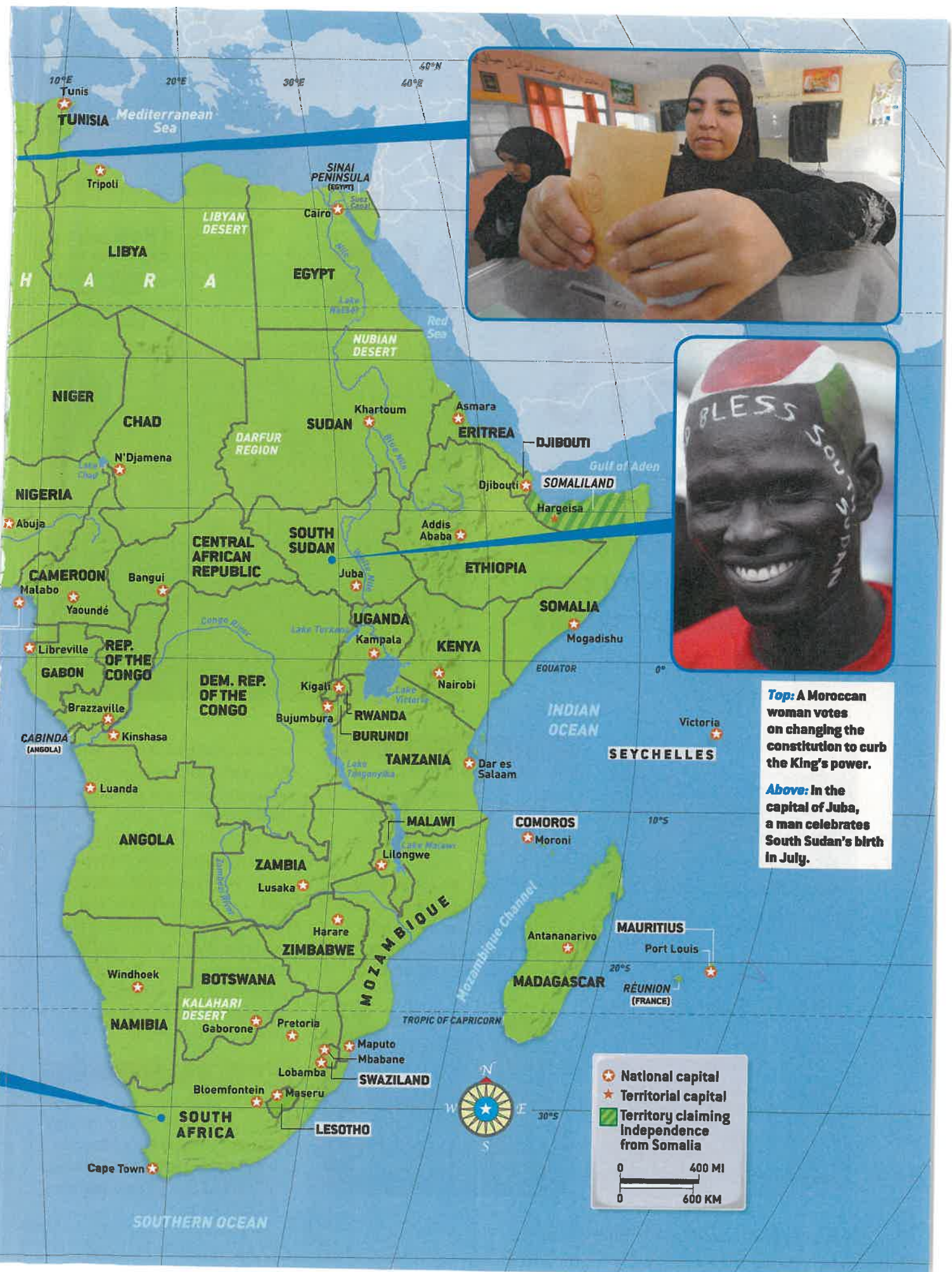


Left: Cell phones and other new technologies are boosting economic growth across Africa.

Below: The world's attention was focused on Africa's wealthiest nation, South Africa, when it hosted the World Cup in 2010.



PAGE 14, TOP TO BOTTOM: GISHON MUNIA/GETTY IMAGES; OCLIVE MASON/GETTY IMAGES; PAGE 15, TOP TO BOTTOM: SADELMAN SENI/AF/GETTY IMAGES/CONA; @ROBERTO SCHMIDT/GETTY IMAGES; MAP: JIM NICKERSON/MP/AN



Top: A Moroccan woman votes on changing the constitution to curb the King's power.

Above: In the capital of Juba, a man celebrates South Sudan's birth in July.

- ★ National capital
- ★ Territorial capital
- ▭ Territory claiming independence from Somalia

0 400 MI
0 600 KM