

THE END OF

CATTLE'S PARADISE

SEVERE DROUGHT AND FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA



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Names and specific locations have been hidden for security reasons

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THE “WORST DROUGHT IN 40 YEARS” CONTINUES

Angola is greatly affected by the negative impacts of climate change.¹ Southern Angola is experiencing the worst drought in 40 years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has observed that “frequency and intensity of droughts has increased in some regions” including in southern Africa since pre-industrial levels due to global warming and that “the frequency and intensity of droughts are projected to increase particularly in the Mediterranean region and southern Africa”.² Similarly, projections indicate a likely increase in the average annual temperature between 1.2 to 3.2°C in 2060 and 1.7 and 5.1°C by 2090 in Angola, with warming projected to occur more rapidly in the interior and eastern parts of Angola.³

When Amnesty International visited the Gambos municipality, in Huíla province, southern Angola, in 2018 and 2019, our team found several cases of hunger and starvation among the traditional pastoralist communities. We saw pastoralists families struggling to produce food for themselves. We were told then that the province was facing its worst drought in 40 years.

Three years on, the drought shows no signs of abating.

Because of the region’s climatic conditions - semiarid, dry and low rainfall - southern Angola is prone to cyclical droughts. The increasingly severe drought in the region has severely affected the pastoralists’ ability to grow food over the years. In the prolonged drought, grazing and watering points for livestock have dried up.

The vulnerability of communities in southern Angola, particularly in Huíla and Cunene provinces, has been accentuated by their recent loss of land: the diversion of communal grazing land to commercial farmers. Official estimates say 67% of the grazing land in the Gambos municipality has been occupied by commercial cattle farmers, including large parts of *Vale de Chimbolela*, known to pastoralists as “the cradle of cattle”, and *Tunda dos Gambos*, the customary grazing commons for the region’s pastoralists. Customary grazing land has historically been used by traditional pastoralists to sustain livestock, particularly cattle, from which they derive food to mitigate the impact of the cyclical drought.

During 2020 and 2021, Amnesty International, in partnership with Associação Construindo Comunidades (Association Building Communities - ACC) and Associação Ame Naame Omunu (ANO), local human rights organizations, visited the Huíla and Cunene provinces⁴ and observed that the drought continued to devastate the livelihoods of pastoralist families

1 Governo de Angola, Ministério da Cultura, Turismo e Ambiente, *Nationally Determined Contribution of Angola*, May 2021, unfccc.int

2 IPCC, *Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse gas fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems - Summary for Policymakers*, August 2019, ipcc.ch

3 World Bank Group, *Climate change knowledge portal*, climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org

4 Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, Amnesty International researchers did not travel to southern Angola themselves. Instead, Amnesty International conducted interviews through local partners and research assistants. Social distancing and other pandemic-related precautions were taken as appropriate.



in Cunene, Huíla and Namibe provinces, as well as other provinces such as Benguela and Huambo. The food insecurity situation has been exacerbated by the prolonged drought, which hampered the 2020/2021 rainy season (which runs from November to April). The World Food Program highlighted that data comparison indicates that the lack of rainfall in the period of November 2020 – January 2021 caused the worst drought in the last 40 years.⁵ It also observed that as a direct consequence of the drought, malnutrition is peaking, and access to water, sanitation and hygiene is increasingly precarious with negative impacts on local communities' health and nutrition.

In May 2021, the WFP estimated that 6 million people in Angola have insufficient food consumption,⁶ which is most prevalent in the south of the country. It also noted that more than 15 million are using crisis or emergency livelihood-based coping strategies such as spending savings or reducing non-food expenses.⁷

According to the Association Building Communities (Associação Construindo Comunidades - ACC), a local non-governmental organization based in Huíla province, the traditional pastoralist families in the Gambos no longer have food and, since 2019, dozens of people have died of malnutrition, older persons and children being particularly affected. As the government remains absent, the local organization has been organizing the distribution of food baskets in the region, but the situation is becoming unbearable.

⁵ WFP Angola Country Brief, March 2021. Retrieved on 11 May 2021 from reliefweb.int

⁶ WFP Angola Country Brief, May 2021. Retrieved on 5 July 2021 from reliefweb.int

⁷ reliefweb.int

FLEEING HUNGER

Angolans living on the border with Namibia, namely in the Cunene and Huíla provinces, have been hit very hard by the impacts of the persistent drought which has impacted their access to food. The 2020/2021 low rainfall figures indicate that the situation is not going to improve in the coming months. The prolonged drought has made the lives of the traditional pastoralist communities much harder and many are unable to cope with the resulting hunger. Since the beginning of March 2021, families began to cross the border into Namibia, a



Dried out transhumance corridor in the Gambos municipality, November 2020. ©BwalaMidia

desperate measure in search of food, water and essential services, such as health care. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reported that Namibian local authorities had recorded a total of 894 Angolan nationals in the Omusati and Kunene regions by March 2021.⁸ On 14 March 2021, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation reported that large numbers of pastoralist families from Huila and Cunene provinces have abandoned their homes to seek refuge in northern Namibia.⁹ In May 2021, Angolan NGOs reported that over 7,000 Angolans, mainly mothers with their children and youth, had fled to Namibia.¹⁰ At the time of writing, the number of Angolans crossing the border into Namibia continues to increase. The Angolan NGOs are calling them “climate refugees”, because the drought and the lack of resources in southern Angola have pushed them to migrate to Namibia as a desperate measure to survive.¹¹

8 IFRC, Namibia: Angolan Migrants Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA), 6 April 2021, reliefweb.int

9 NBC, Hundreds flee from Angola due to hunger, 14 March 2021, www.nbc.na

10 Angolan civil society joint round table, Hunger in Southern Angola, 6 May 2021.

11 Amnesty International does not use the terms “climate refugees” or “environmental refugees”. It advocates for each person who has fled their country of origin or habitual residence and seeks international protection to have their case examined on an individual basis through fair and effective procedures. It also calls on governments to safeguard the rights of people displaced or at risk of displacement in the context of climate. See Amnesty International, [Stop Burning Our Rights! What Governments and Corporations Must Do to Protect Humanity from the Climate Crisis](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol/30/3476/2021/) (Index: POL 30/3476/2021), 7 June 2021, [amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org), pp. 115-120.

LAND OCCUPATION

In southern Angola, particularly in Huíla and Cunene provinces, hunger is not only the result of drought. Food insecurity has arisen, in part, from another crucial element: the diversion of communal grazing land to commercial farmers. In 2019, Amnesty International exposed the diversion of communal grazing land by the government to commercial cattle farmers without due process in the Gambos municipality, Huíla province. According to the government, 67% of the grazing land in the Gambos municipality was occupied by commercial cattle farmers, which includes large parts of *Vale de Chimbolela*, known to pastoralists as “the cradle of cattle”, and *Tunda dos Gambos*, the customary grazing commons for the region’s pastoralists. In the report [The end of cattle’s paradise](#), Amnesty showed how the occupation of the more fertile land has undermined the economic and social resilience of pastoralists communities, particularly their ability to produce food and survive droughts in southern Angola.

“ How can they occupy the Tunda? Tunda belongs to many people; it belongs to the Mukubai; to the Mahakavona; to those who come from Ombwa; to those who come from Teka... This place belongs to all of us.”

Pastoralist in the Huíla province, November 2020

According to local organisations, as the Covid-19 pandemic hit Angola in 2020, the government had other priorities to address and the land diversion and hunger in the southern region remained in the shadow. Throughout 2020, the government did not adopt any sustained measure to protect the pastoralist communities from further land diversion nor make reparations to the communities impacted by the land seizure in Huíla and Cunene provinces.



In 2020, the pastoralist communities experienced a few attempts of irregular occupation of their communal grazing land. For instance, a commercial farmer in the Huíla province allegedly forced representatives of a community to sign a document whose content was unknown to them. According to local pastoralist testimonies, one known commercial farmer, with the assistance of his employees, physically forced the community representatives to put their fingerprints on the said document while threatening them with violence. To this date, the community representatives say they have not been informed about the content of the signed document. Local reports say that the document was a land concession which the commercial farmer might use in Court to legalize his illegal land occupation. The community members, however, allege they were not officially notified of any land registration process.

As the government fails to demarcate rural communal lands and issue communal title deeds for occupation, possession and right of use, the pastoralist communities will remain vulnerable to irregular occupation of their communal lands and to physical and psychological harm.

“ I asked: why should we sign this document? They said we should sign in order to clarify everything. Then he grabs my wrist and says, ‘Sign!’ I told him I didn’t agree with what he was doing to me.”

A representative of a pastoralist community, Huíla province, November 2020

OUR CULTURE IS AT RISK

Southern Angola has a unique anthropological wealth. Ethnic groups, such as Bantu and pre-Bantu, have lived there for centuries. To illustrate this ethnic diversity, local NGOs detail that among the pre-Bantu there are different groups such as Khoi-San or !Xhu, Kwisi, Kwepe, Vatwa. Among the Bantu communities are the Vahелеlo, which includes Kuvale, Hakavona, Tyavikwa, Vandzimba, Himba, and many other ethnic groups.

Older people in the traditional communities are considered living libraries and repositories of ancient and unique knowledge, values and principles. They are responsible for transmitting their wisdom and tradition to younger generations, including how to survive in the local climatic and geographic conditions.

Older people are increasingly threatened by the ongoing drought and diversion of their traditional land by the government for commercial farmers. Local NGOs report that the migration of youth and families to urban areas, and to Namibia, is causing the process of “human desertification”¹² of the rural areas in southern Angola. Older people and their ancient knowledge are left behind. Often unable to walk long distances to search for water or food, they are at risk of malnutrition.

Without older people, not only are the pastoralists left with fewer resources from which to draw on for their resilience, but the whole culture of the pastoralists is under threat of extinction. The continued omission and failure by the government of Angola to protect those traditional communities have thus contributed to this silent process of cultural extinction and “human desertification”.



A member of a pastoralist community, Huila province, July 2019 ©BwalaMidia

¹² Angolan civil society joint round table, Hunger in Southern Angola: Conclusion and recommendations, 6 May 2021

“The occupation of communal lands fragmented the social fabric of the rural areas in our region, greatly weakened family cohesion and divided families. The strongest people who could actually produce (food) left. These communities will not be the same in a few years.”

A representative of a pastoralist community, Huíla province, November 2020

Additionally, in June 2020 Angola signed (but not yet ratified) the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of older persons in Africa. According to the protocol, States have obligations to meet older people's specific health needs; to ensure their active participation; and, in situations of risk, including natural calamities, to “receive humane treatment, protection and respect at all times” and to “be among those to enjoy access, on a priority basis, to assistance.”¹³ Angola must take greater steps to protect the rights of older people and provide them adequate access to essential services.

13 African Protocol on Older Persons, Articles 12, 14, 15, and 17.



GOVERNMENT'S FAILURES

While Angolan laws – including the Constitution, land law, and environmental law – protect rural communal lands, such as the Gambos communal grazing lands, as non-grantable lands, the government is failing in its duty. The diversion of communal grazing land for commercial livestock farming in the Gambos represents the government's failure to uphold its own laws and international human rights obligations.

“ When we came to this region, the pastures were all free, without fences. We walked freely on these corridors with our cattle. We would move from one side to the other, and these paths were never closed. This transhumance corridor¹⁴ is old, these farmers are visitors, and we want them to free our corridors as they used to.”

A representative of a pastoralist community, Huíla province,
November 2020

In failing to treat customary lands, such as Tunda dos Gambos and Vale de Chimbolela as non-grantable communal grazing lands, enabling commercial ranchers to occupy these lands, as well as in not providing any schemes to mitigate the impact of the commercial farming activities on the right to food, the Angolan government has failed in its national, regional and international obligations to take all necessary steps to protect the pastoralists' right to food in the Gambos.

The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent, and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure a fulfilling and dignified life free of fear, both physically and mentally, and individually and collectively.¹⁵

¹⁴ Transhumance is the practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer.

¹⁵ Special Rapporteur on the Right to food United Nations Document E/CN.4/2001/53, par.14: See also, detailed description in the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Human Rights Council Session 23, A/HRC/25/57, 2014.



While Amnesty International, ACC and ANO acknowledge Angola's commitment to combat climate change and protect its communities from its impacts, particularly most recently through Angola's ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2020, submission of its nationally determined contribution (NDC) in May 2021 and the President's visit to Cunene province in July 2021, Angola must adopt urgent and effective climate adaptation measures to improve the resilience of traditional communities in southern Angola who are undergoing the adverse effects of severe drought.

The living conditions among the pastoralists are becoming increasingly precarious and unbearable; the pastoralists' rights to food, right to an adequate standard of living, access to livelihoods and the right to take part in cultural life through cultural preservation are greatly impacted. The devastating drought has worsened the family livelihood situation. As the crisis continues in the region, an increasing number of pastoralist families seek refuge in Namibia.

“ How can families withstand this challenging time until one day they find a more sustainable way out? It's impossible! Because there is no such plan. The government has failed to be serious about designing a sustainable plan to protect the population.” A representative of a pastoralist community, Huíla province, November 2020

TO ADDRESS THIS GROWING CRISIS, WE ARE CALLING ON THE GOVERNMENT OF ANGOLA TO:

- Immediately provide sustained and regular emergency food assistance and access to clean and safe water for domestic use and consumption in rural areas of Huíla and Cunene provinces.
- Conduct a detailed municipality-wide investigation into concerns of malnutrition and hunger in the rural areas of Huíla and Cunene provinces with a view to collect disaggregated data including by gender and age, in order to devise appropriate urgent interventions for the immediate and longer term.
- Adopt a long-term strategy to increase the rural communities' resilience and adaptation capacity to climate change-driven hazards, including through community adaptation strategies to improve food security and implementing a water collection and storage system in drought-prone areas to ensure continuity of human supply and watering of livestock.
- Coordinate efforts at national, regional and international level to mitigate the negative effects of climate-related hazards, monitor population movements in the context of severe drought and provide durable solutions to displaced people.
- Stop land granting in the rural areas of Huíla and Cunene provinces and ensure that those responsible for the granting of large parts of communal grazing land of rural areas of Huíla and Cunene provinces for commercial livestock farming are held accountable for previously failing to act in accordance to the law.
- Engage in a process of genuine consultation with members of the pastoralist communities, in collaboration with local civil society, and provide reparations to affected communities in accordance with domestic law and international standards, including providing effective remedy and compensation.
- Work with civil society to demarcate all rural communal lands and issue communal title deeds for occupation, possession and rights of use, as decreed in article 37 of the Land Law (Lei 9/04) and in article 18 of Decree 58/07.
- Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa and revise domestic laws to bring them in line with the protocol's obligations.

WE ALSO URGE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO:

- Provide the necessary financial and technical assistance to the government and local civil society to support rural communities in Angola to overcome the impacts of the drought and to provide durable solutions to communities displaced into Namibia.
- Provide financial support to Angola to effectively implement the conditional adaptation measures listed in its nationally determined contribution (NDC), particularly to create water drainage systems in high-risk areas, including Huíla and Cunene provinces.
- Provide capacity building and technology transfer for human rights-consistent climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to the Angolan government and local civil society.

TAKE ACTION

Direct these calls to your own government representatives, Angolan diplomatic representatives in your country, Ministry of Foreign Affairs/State Department, and relevant parliament/congressional groups.

Letters to the Angolan authorities can be addressed to:

V.Ex.^a Ministro da Justiça e Assuntos e Direitos Humanos

Sr. Francisco Manuel Monteiro de Queiroz

Address: Ministério da Justiça e Direitos Humanos, rua 17 de Setembro,
Luanda, Angola

and Copy to:

Secretary of State for Human Rights and Citizenship

Ana Celeste Cardoso Januário

Address: Secretaria de Estado para os Direitos Humanos e Cidadania, rua 17 de Setembro,
Luanda, Angola

Email: anaceleste.januario@minjusdh.gov.ao



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