



Pascal Maitre / Cosmos

## Feeding the Golden Calf

Somalia may be suffering an epic food shortage and a state of civil unrest eclipsing even Darfur, but the country's citizens keep their priorities clear: their livestock. Farmers in Mogadishu routinely risk life and limb safeguarding dangerously overflowing truckloads of corn stalks to ensure that cattle are adequately fed. This, in spite of the fact that as of August, more than three million of their countrymen were in need of humanitarian assistance—a 77 percent increase since January, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

Why do Somalia's livestock trump starving children, women, and men in the distribution of the country's meager food supply? It comes down to a bleak economic reality: Livestock accounts for nearly half of Somalia's GDP and roughly 80 percent of export earnings—indisputably the main source of income for the country's destitute. In short, Somalia's Zebu cattle, Black Head sheep, and Somali goats are a more valuable resource

than its people.

The hunger problem becomes all the more precarious when you consider that world food prices have nearly doubled since 2005. Add record droughts, steady rioting, and massive displacement to the equation, and you have the perfect storm to exacerbate an already-untenable hunger epidemic. And while developed nations continue to offer humanitarian relief to the millions of malnourished Somalis, targeted attacks against relief workers—perpetrated as part of a shadowy terror campaign—have made such attempts virtually impossible to execute. So far this year, Somalia has suffered more than 110 security incidents involving humanitarian staff, including the killings of twenty-four aid workers.

In the midst of such a logistical quagmire, the livestock may finally offer proof that in the end, the meek just might inherit the earth. —DANIEL K. EISENBUD