

Development Crises

Back to blogging. I write mainly to keep sane, but also to think through subjects that are complex or I worry that I need to but don't completely understand yet.

Today it's development crises. My day job deals with helping to detect large-scale human crises that aren't natural disasters, but apart from the obvious categories (famine, conflict, poverty limiting access to basic resources like food, medicine, education), it's not very easy to pin down a what a non-disaster crisis is, and what is typically done to detect and act to mitigate it. Once I've thought about what large-scale human crises are, I also need to think about how the other work that I believe is relevant to them is starting to form a connected space, and what help that space needs from us to keep developing well.

So first. Nomenclature. A quick [Google search](#) on "development crisis famine" shows phrases like "social crisis", "humanitarian crisis", "famine crisis" and "food crisis". A wander into [Google trends](#) with "development crisis" shows "human development crisis". Wandering around some on the pages (e.g. a [Guardian piece](#) of the impact of global crises on development) shows global drivers like the food, fuel and financial crises, climate change and confidence. Hang on? Confidence? I know that's a big driver in financial markets, but it's interesting to think about its role in development.

And examples. There's a crisis across the Horn of Africa at the moment. The rains failed, crops have failed, livestock is dead and people are starving. But it's more complex than that, as well explained in this [allAfrica.com piece](#). The guardian piece has a good summary of the IDS [Re-imagining Development report](#) which looked at the complex effects of the 2008 food, fuel and finance crisis interactions. And on a smaller scale, there are the knock-on effects of the natural disasters (that we don't deal with) on development, for instance [the heavy effect that the Eifjallsjokull eruption had](#) on industries like Kenyan flower-growing (which relies on air traffic between Africa and Europe). And then we have this quote in [sustainable development](#): "[A]n environmental crisis, a development crisis, an energy crisis. They are all one.... Ecology and economy are becoming ever more interwoven—locally, regionally, nationally, and globally—into a seamless net of causes and effects."

So. We have drivers, which can interact with each other and trigger development crises either directly or through causal chains that we may or may not know about yet. And we have crises, and the effects that those crises have on people, environments and social systems (e.g. education and conflict). This sounds very much like a system to me – and one amenable to some serious analysis, sensitivity modeling and risk management. Which must be going on somewhere in the world.