**Stories about African Food Crisis from Action Aid, 2008**

**In Kenya's parched Rift valley villagers are resorting to boiling poisonous wild fruits in a desperate effort to stave off hunger.**

As dawn breaks in the remote village of Pilil in Tangulbei division – men commandeer their livestock for the days grazing while the women, set out in search of food.

Under the scorching sun though, there is barely any food or pasture to be found. The seasonal rains have consistently failed for two years.

**"I had thirty heads of cattle a year ago. I am now left with only one which is too emaciated that it can barely stand,"** says 82 year old Apollo Kibet as he points to the cow now in its dying phase.

The frail old man tries to hide his despair but his emotions get the better of him and starts sobbing as he looks at his three year old grandson.

**"My household depends on me for their survival, how can I provide for them when I have nothing."** Said Apollo.

**"The only thing that defines a man in our culture is cattle and I have none. I would rather die than live in this condition"** he adds as he wipes the tears from his eyes. The same sentiments are echoed all over his village.

Women in the village go about gathering poisonous wild berries that they boil for hours on end to remove the poison from them. These wild berries are what the communities in the region have come to regard as food for months now.

Boiling the berries consumes a lot of water which in itself is a scarce commodity in the area. The choice between water for other domestic uses and water for boiling the berries for eight hours is a tough one.

**"I have to set out by 7 am for me to get these wild fruits and prepare them in time for tonight's meal."** said Mary Ngoleyang 32, and a mother of three.

Her three malnourished children, aged from 8 years to 3 years are constantly crying barely understanding why their mother cannot give them food. The mother, too poor to buy them clothes can only look aside and continue fanning the firewood that she is using to cook the poisonous wild berries.

The fruit, known as sorich in the local dialect is the only food that the community, has to survive on as relief food provided by the government and humanitarian organisations has not been consistent or sufficient.

**"I have been boiling these fruits for a year now; we have no other source food. I spend the whole day boiling sorich and if one dares consume the wild fruit before they're ready, the risk could be fatal."** Says Selina Kele, a forty eight year old mother of four.

Another mother, Lodap, speaks about the effects the berries have on her children:

**"The berries are bitter. [When we prepare them] children get a burning effect [in their throats], it can even disturb their stomachs and they get sick..."**

Even these desperate measures can't last much longer. The berries are depleting fast and the women are covering greater distances each day to find them.

In addition, it's estimated that in two weeks time, the little water available will be over and this will leave the community without water to cook or drink.

Musa Kibon, ActionAid's programme assistant in Tangulbei talks about the only measures left for many people,**"The inhabitants have started eating carcasses of their dead animals portending a serious health risk. If humanitarian assistance is not forthcoming soon, humans will also succumb to the drought"**

ActionAid is assisting in relief operations especially by bringing water tankers to the area but more food relief is needed to avert a possible fatal famine.