

Out of Somalia

Housing over 300,000 people, Dagahaley, Ifo and Hagadera, the three Somali refugee camps in Kenya, make up the third largest city in the country and one of the biggest refugee camps in the world.

But the camps have been full since a long time. In February 2011 alone, 10,000 newly arrived refugees, who left their home due to the drought and fighting in Somalia, had to build makeshift huts on the outskirts of the camps.





On this day in February nine large families have made their way through the arid desert the previous night – on foot or in the back of trucks. Nine? No, there are twenty-six new arrivals, we find out one hour later when we come across a young man spreading out the few possessions he managed to bring with him from Somalia in the dust. His wife and children, a three-year-old and a three-month-old baby, huddle in the sparse shade of a tree with spindly, green leaves.



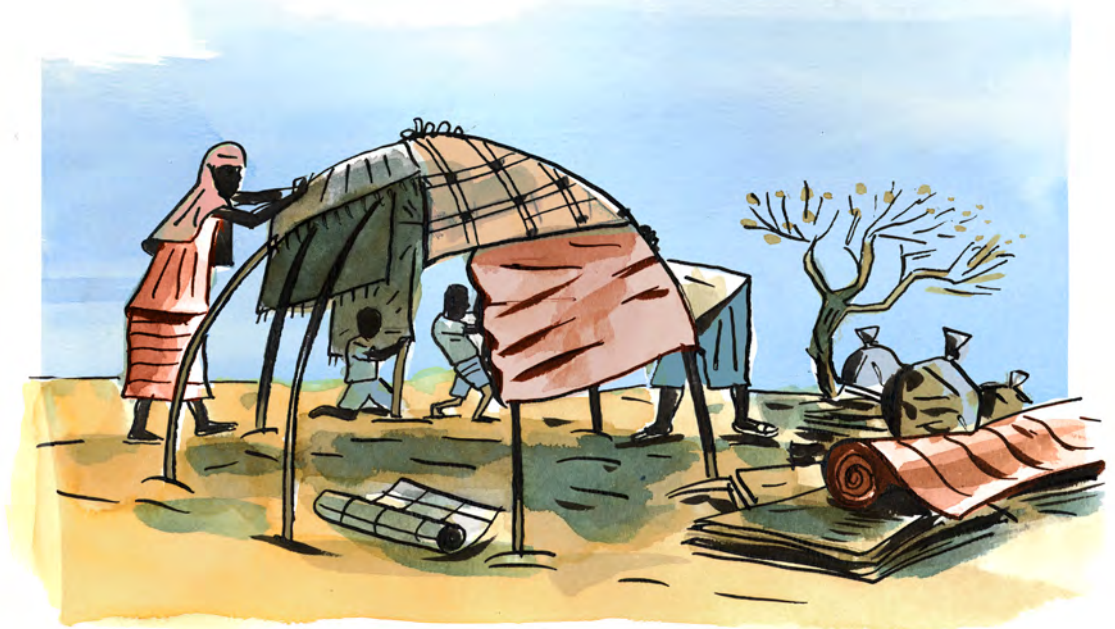
It doesn't take long to build a hut – provided you have some wood.



An iron bar is used to make holes in the ground, into which thin branches are inserted.



The branches are bent towards the centre and tied together ...



... then covered with pieces of cloth, plastic bags and empty maize sacks.

Mother and father, two daughters and five sons – this family fled from Mogadishu three weeks ago. After the house in which they lived was repeatedly shot at and a neighbouring family was killed, they decided there and then to leave the city, says the mother. As soon as there is peace in Somalia, she wants to return there, but for now she is glad to have found a space in the refugee camp.



The dust is everywhere, it settles on huts, clothes and faces, and the wind constantly blows new dust clouds across the veldt. An elderly man tells how many people in Somalia would love to come here, but cannot scrape together the small amount of money that refugees have to pay for petrol and to buy one or two sacks of onions to sustain them on their journey. A teenager in a dusty T-shirt complains that there may be water in the camp, but there's nowhere near enough for him to wash himself and his clothes regularly. He's ashamed to stand before us in dirty clothes, he tells us sadly, this is not what he's used to.



A hacking cough can be heard from one of the huts. The mother – so weak she can hardly walk – gazes at us with feverish eyes. Together with five of her eight children, they are driven by MSF in a 4x4 to the hospital, a cluster of houses in the centre of the Dagahaley refugee camp. Patients' relatives are waiting on the large site, sitting together in groups, cooking on small fires and comforting their children. In one corner, newly-washed brightly-coloured cloths flutter in the breeze as a group of men and women sweep the yard. At a table in the open, right next to the children's department, small children are being vaccinated. The cook is carrying firewood into his hut to cook porridge and you can hear the gas flame hissing under the autoclaves in the steriliser building. A peaceful scene. Hard to imagine that some of these people have only just escaped the bullets and blows of marauding militias.

