

HORN OF AFRICA DROUGHT: HUMANITARIAN KEY MESSAGES



Photo: UNICEF Somalia

HIGHLIGHTS



The Horn of Africa is experiencing one of its most severe droughts in recent history, with more than 15 million people acutely food insecure in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.



Families are taking desperate measures to survive, with thousands leaving their homes in search of food, water and pasture. The risks faced by women and girls—including gender-based violence and death during childbirth—have risen sharply since the drought began.



The threat of large-scale loss of life is rising each day and more funding is immediately required to enable humanitarian partners to respond at-scale to this once-in-a-generation crisis.

KEY MESSAGES

- Communities in the Horn of Africa are experiencing one of the most severe droughts in their memory as they brace for the prospect of a fourth consecutive poor season, which could lead to an unprecedented climate emergency in the region.** Latest forecasts indicate that the March to May 2022 rainy season is likely to be average to below-average. This comes after the October-December 2020, March-May 2021 and October-December 2021 seasons were all marred by below-average rainfall, leaving large swathes of Somalia, southern and south-eastern Ethiopia, and northern and eastern Kenya facing exceptional drought. If the March-May rains fail, this would be the first time in the last 40 years that the region has endured four consecutive below-normal seasons.
- Between 15 and 16 million people are waking each day to high levels of acute food insecurity and rising malnutrition across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, and some areas in Somalia are now at risk of famine.** Nearly 6 million people in Somalia are acutely food insecure—including 81,000 people in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)—which is higher than during the 2011 famine and the 2016/2017 severe drought. Between 5.5 million and 6.5 million people in Ethiopia and some 3.5 million people in Kenya are severely food insecure due to the drought. Millions of livestock—which pastoralist families rely upon for sustenance and livelihoods—are emaciated or dead, including more than 1.5 million animals that have died in Kenya, and over 1.5 million livestock that have died in Somali, Oromia and SNNP regions of Ethiopia. Consequently, children have less access to milk, negatively affecting their nutrition. Across the three countries, about 5.7 million children are currently acutely malnourished, including more than 1.7 million who are severely acutely

malnourished, and these figures are expected to rise to 6.9 million and 2 million respectively if rains fail in the coming weeks, according to UNICEF.

3. **Food prices are rising in many drought-affected areas, due to a combination of macro-economic challenges, below-average harvests and rising prices on international markets, including as a result of the war in Ukraine.** The cost of a food basket has already risen by 66 per cent in Ethiopia and by 36 per cent in Somalia, leaving families unable to afford even basic items and forcing them to sell their hard-earned properties and assets in exchange for food and other life-saving items. There are also repercussions for food for refugee programmes, which are already impacted by reduced rations due to lack of funding support.
4. **Across the Horn of Africa, millions of people are facing dire water shortages.** Many water points have dried up or diminished in quality, heightening the risk of water-borne diseases and increasing the risk of skin and eye infections as families are forced to ration their water use and prioritize drinking and cooking over hygiene. In some of the worst affected areas in Somalia, water prices have spiked by up to 72 per cent since last November. Women and girls are having to walk longer distances to access water, exacerbating their potential exposure to gender-based violence. Water shortages are also impacting infection prevention and control in health facilities and schools, leading to poor treatment outcomes for children, pregnant women and other vulnerable groups. In Ethiopia and Kenya, there are already reports of an increase in pregnant women being exposed to infections—the worst of which have resulted in death—following deliveries both at home and at health facilities due to limited availability of water.
5. **Families are taking desperate measures to survive, with thousands leaving their homes in search of food, water and pasture, increasing the risk of inter-communal conflict, as well as heightening pressure on already limited basic services.** Since January 2021, over 759,000 people in Somalia have been displaced in search of water, food and pasture, while over half a million were forcibly displaced by the conflict. Displaced people are migrating to near-by towns, joining existing camps for internally displaced people, some have crossed borders seeking support, or traversing dangerous distances controlled by armed groups and contaminated with explosives in search of work or humanitarian assistance. In southern Ethiopia, some 286,000 people have been forced from their homes due to the worsening drought. In the ASAL region of Kenya, pastoralists are trekking long distances to find water and pasture for livestock, leading to resource-based and inter-communal tensions and conflict and exposing women, children and the elderly who are left behind to heightened protection risks and shortages of essential items, including food. People who were already internally displaced before the drought, and living without the support of their traditional family network or other social safety nets, have been forced to further relocate in search of food, water and pasture for their livestock, thereby becoming more vulnerable and more exposed to protection risks.
6. **The drought crisis is having devastating consequences for women and children, heightening the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation and abuse, and hampering children's access to education.** Risks of gender based violence—including sexual violence, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence and female genital mutilation—are increasing during this crisis, while services to respond remain limited. Female headed-households and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to increased violence, exploitation and abuse. In some communities, child marriage has reportedly risen, with families marrying-off young girls in order to lessen demands on their own resources and potentially get money that they can use for food and other necessities. In some communities, families have stopped sending girls to school, prioritizing boys as they cannot afford the school fees. In Somalia, the drought emergency has disrupted education for 1.4 million children, of whom 420,000—45 per cent of them girls—are at risk of dropping out of school. In Ethiopia, more than 514,000 children across affected areas lost four to five months of their academic year due to drought.
7. **While resilience-building efforts across the region have made important progress, communities have been hit by increasingly frequent and severe droughts, making it harder and harder for families to recover between shocks.** In the past ten years alone, the Horn of Africa has endured three severe droughts (2010-2011, 2016-2017 and 2020-2021). The 2010-2011 drought, combined with conflict and complex humanitarian access issues, caused famine in Somalia. The 2016-2017 drought brought millions of people in the region to the brink of famine, which was only prevented through rapid and timely humanitarian response. The increasing frequency of shocks in the region has meant that the vulnerable have little space to recover and bounce back, leading to an increase in the number of internally displaced people.
8. **At the same time, many drought-affected communities are struggling to cope with the cumulative consequences of other shocks, including conflict, flooding, COVID-19 and desert locusts.** Previously, many of these communities were hit by the extreme rains and flooding which struck the region in 2019, and which was one of the drivers of the historical desert locust outbreak which began in late-2019. The Horn of Africa has also been negatively impacted by the deteriorating macroeconomic conditions and trade disruptions related to the war in Ukraine, at a time when households are still facing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods and income sources. In addition, millions of people in Ethiopia and Somalia have been affected by conflicts, which may also hinder people's freedom of movement as they seek reprieve from the drought.

- 9. The delivery of life-saving and life-sustaining assistance has scaled up significantly in recent months,** in complement to pre-existing livelihoods, resilience, social protection and systems strengthening interventions. More than 6.4 million people have been reached with humanitarian assistance across Somalia (almost 2.5 million), Ethiopia (3 million) and Kenya (936,000).
- 10. However, the threat of large-scale loss of life is rising each day and more funding is immediately required to enable humanitarian partners to respond at-scale to this once-in-a-generation crisis.** Humanitarian partners have appealed for more than US\$4.4 billion to provide life-saving assistance and protection to about 29.1 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia in 2022. However, only a small percentage of this funding has been received, severely hampering the response to the rapidly deepening drought. The Flash Appeal for Kenya is being revised and will increase significantly as partners aim to respond to the rapidly rising needs driven by the drought for the next six months. We therefore urgently call on donors to fund these appeals so that we can immediately respond to the life-threatening needs across the Horn of Africa. In particular, we call on donors to fund the vibrant network of local, community-based and women-led organizations, including refugee-led organizations, which carry-out incredible work in their communities in drought-affected communities each and every day.
- 11. We welcome the emergency declarations issued by the Governments of Kenya (September 2021) and Somalia (November 2021), and call on governments across the region to prioritize the drought emergency.** It is vital that funds are made available for timely and comprehensive support to drought-affected communities at all levels. We also call on governments across the region to ensure that humanitarian workers can access people in need in safety and security.

** For the purposes of these Key Messages, the Horn of Africa includes: Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.*

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