

HORN OF AFRICA DROUGHT: HUMANITARIAN KEY MESSAGES



Photo: Islamic Relief /Kenya

HIGHLIGHTS



The Horn of Africa is experiencing one of its worst droughts in recent history, with 12-14 million people severely 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.



Action is required now to help people and communities impacted by the drought to survive the period ahead, while supporting them to return to self-reliance and build resilience against future shocks.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1. The Horn of Africa is experiencing one of its most severe La Niña-induced droughts in recent history following three back-to-back poor rainy seasons,** leading the Governments of Kenya (September 2021) and Somalia (November 2021) to declare national emergencies. 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. In Somalia, which has been hardest hit, nearly 90 per cent of the country's districts—66 out of 74—are experiencing drought and between early October and late November 2021, rainfall in parts of the country was between 55 and 70 per cent below 40-year average levels.
- 2. Between 12 and 14 million people are waking each day to face high levels of acute food insecurity and severe water shortages across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, due to drought in the first quarter of 2022.** About 5.5 million children are expected to be acutely malnourished in these three countries in 2022, including more than 1.6 million severely acutely malnourished, and migration of livestock herds has reduced milk availability, negatively affecting nutrition, especially for children under age 5. Many harvests have failed and millions of livestock—which pastoralist families rely upon for sustenance and livelihoods—are emaciated or dead. In parts of Kenya and Somalia, January/February 2022 cereal harvests are expected to be 60 to 70 per cent below-average. In Kenya, more than 1.4 million animals have died, according to the Government of Kenya's National Drought Management Agency's mid-season assessment. In just two zones (Borena and Dawa) of Ethiopia's Oromia region, an FAO rapid assessment in November 2021 found that approximately 68,000

animals had died and over 1 million were in poor condition. 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, leaving families unable to afford even basic items. Families have been forced to sell their hard-earned properties and assets in exchange for food and other life-saving items.

- 3. 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. Women and girls are having to walk longer distances to access water, exacerbating their potential exposure to gender-based violence. Water shortages could also impact infection prevention and control in health facilities and schools, leading to poor treatment outcomes for children, pregnant women and other vulnerable groups.
- 4. 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.** In Kenya and Somalia, 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. Rising livestock prices also fuel conflict, according to IFPRI, and recent clashes between nomadic pastoralists in drought-affected areas highlight the vicious cycle of escalating violence and food insecurity. In Somalia, people are migrating to near-by towns, joining existing camps for internally displaced people, or traversing dangerous distances controlled by armed groups and contaminated with explosives in search of work or humanitarian assistance. In 2021, approximately 169,000 people in Somalia displaced in search of water, food and pasture, while over half a million were forcibly displaced by the conflict, according to UNHCR. In both Southern Ethiopia and the ASAL region of Kenya, people have begun migrating to areas with perceived improved access to food and water.
- 5. 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.** 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. Risks of GBV including sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as intimate partner violence are increasing during this crisis, and displacement and services to respond remain limited. Internally displaced communities have been particularly hard-hit by the drought, which has compounded previous shocks they have endured and undermined their self-reliance. Many displaced people, who are 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. 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 .
- 7. 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 COVID-19 pandemic, like many other countries across the globe. 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.
- 8. This drought is becoming one of the worst climate-induced emergencies seen in the Horn of Africa.** The March to May rainy season is notoriously difficult to forecast, with global models showing mixed signals and high levels of uncertainty for most of the region. However, some recent analogue forecasts, based on the analysis of Pacific March-May sea surface temperatures, past droughts and a number of previous La Niña years, suggest the possibility of another below-average season in 2022. If this were to occur, it would result in an unprecedented (in the last 40 years) sequence of four below-normal rainfall seasons and major increases in food insecurity would be expected. Regardless of the performance of the next rainy season, we have a brief window in which to scale up our response on a no regrets basis, before communities experience the worst effects of this drought. In pastoralist communities, needs will rapidly rise in February and March, while in communities reliant on agriculture, needs will peak from April to June.
- 9. It is imperative that we act now.** The delivery of lifesaving and life-sustaining assistance has scaled up significantly in recent months, in complement to pre-existing livelihoods, resilience, social protection and systems strengthening interventions. However, more is

urgently required to avert large-scale loss of life in the Horn of Africa in the period ahead, while working to enable communities to return to self-reliance and build resilience against future shocks.

10. 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. We 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. At the same time, we welcome the emergency declarations issued by the Governments of Kenya and Somalia and call on governments across the region to prioritize the drought emergency by allocating the necessary funds to provide timely comprehensive support to their communities. 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.*

[Updated in February 2022]