

Drought and food security crisis in the Horn of Africa

HPG roundtable communiqué | 7 June 2022

On 7 June, a group of senior humanitarian actors and independent experts from Somalia and the United Kingdom met at ODI to discuss the urgent food security crisis in East Africa, and in Somalia in particular. While acknowledging the current challenging political and funding environment for catalysing action, there was consensus that there has not been sufficient leadership, prioritisation and collective effort amongst UK-based humanitarian, political, or media stakeholders in relation to this crisis. The gravity and urgency of the situation prompted agreement that:

The climatic situation is unprecedented, extreme and likely to worsen into 2023. Four consecutive rainy seasons have failed for the first time in at least 40 years. Forecasts indicate that the October–December rainy season will also likely fail. A continuing strong La Niña event also raises concerns about the following season in early 2023.

There is a likelihood of mass starvation. Malnutrition levels are alarming, with 16.7 million people already facing high acute food insecurity in the region. Famine is underway in parts of Somalia. One in three livestock in Somalia’s most affected regions have died. Because the next rainy season is not due for several more months, *it is already inevitable that the situation will become much more severe.*

Scaling up funding is key to preventing widespread deaths. Conditions are as bad as in 2011, when famine was declared and 260,000 lives were lost in Somalia alone, and in 2017, when a major, collective humanitarian effort played a significant role in averting mass deaths. This time, we are in a worse climatic situation, and yet funding is running at just one-quarter of 2017 levels, with only 18% of requirements currently met.

The severity of the crisis demands prioritisation of those most at risk of mortality. Humanitarian actors must focus on socially marginalised groups, those in difficult to access areas and on malnutrition-related interventions to minimise loss of life.

UK humanitarian actors must scale-up their ambition and coordinate their policy, media and fundraising activities to match the scale of the crisis. While mortality is already inevitable, mass casualties can still be prevented. The focus now must be on fundraising and other efforts to support targeted, emergency interventions that can mitigate loss of life in the short term.

A coordinated effort should focus on the following:

- **Work to create the necessary public and media support for a Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal.** A DEC appeal is recognised to not just raise funds, but to raise the profile of the situation and to mobilise wider action. Greater media attention is required to meet [DEC launch criteria](#).



- **Increase pressure on the UK government to increase funding.** The UK government has previously shown considerable leadership in relation to crises in the Horn of Africa and should urgently increase its funding. But it can use other levers too: it can use its political leverage to accelerate financing from international financial institutions – such as the World Bank’s Crisis Response Window and Immediate Response – and United Nations funding mechanisms. It should work to raise the alarm with other donor countries, especially Gulf states, as well as other non-traditional donors.
- **Encourage the UK government to use other tools at its disposal.** As a ‘penholder’ for Somalia at the UN Security Council (UNSC), it can lead in triggering a UNSC debate in line with Resolution 2417 as the threshold for widespread food insecurity has already been met. On the ground, it can also provide political support to national governments dealing with the crisis, and advocate to improve humanitarian access.
- **Ensure this crisis is a priority on the world stage.** UK agencies should work with humanitarian colleagues and partners in Brussels, Berlin and Washington DC to build international momentum and urgency, as well as unlock funding. These efforts should also aim to ensure that food insecurity, in East Africa in particular, is the main advocacy theme for the G7, G20, COP27 and other external opportunities.
- **Use Ukraine as leverage for action, not an excuse for inaction.** While the conflict in Ukraine is commanding public and political attention, efforts can be made to harness the outpouring of public solidarity, and to make the strategic linkages on food insecurity. Following the same logic, this should be accompanied by efforts to ensure that the scope of funding for the Ukraine crisis can be broadened to cover life-saving interventions in Somalia and other countries affected by the wider fallout of the conflict.
- **Activate and resource a senior-level, UK-based East Africa advocacy task force.** A multi-pronged, coordinated advocacy strategy is needed to raise attention to the crisis with government parliament, the general public and media. Here, UK agencies can amplify the voices of the Somali and East African diaspora and should bring in political champions and others who can help raise attention and pressure.