



PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS OF THE DROUGHT IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Advocacy Note



Across the Horn of Africa, at least **36.1 million** people have now been affected by the drought which began in October 2020

Over a million people are now displaced in search of safety and assistance, including food, water, and shelter with devastating consequences for women, children, and the elderly

Significant gaps persist in providing life-saving multi-sectoral Protection, Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services

Only **30%** of the target humanitarian appeal has been met

Background

Across the Horn of Africa, at least 36.1 million people have now been affected by the drought which began in October 2020, including 24.1 million in **Ethiopia**, 7.8 million in **Somalia** and 4.2 million in **Kenya**. This represents a significant increase from July 2022 (when an estimated 19.4 million people were affected), reflecting the impact of the drought in additional geographic areas of Ethiopia, as well as the rising needs in Somalia.¹

Many drought-affected communities are struggling to cope with the cumulative consequences of other shocks, including conflicts and insecurity, climate change (flooding, drought, and food insecurity), COVID-19, ongoing impacts of desert locusts on agropastoral communities, and economic factors affecting supply chain and inflation increasing the costs of basic goods and services.

The impact of the **Ukraine** crisis continues to compound

all these shocks with global wheat prices at a record high in June 2022 and the international community redirecting its financial and humanitarian support to the Ukraine emergency. Internally Displaced People (IDPs), refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons and migrants are at a heightened risk of food insecurity as many have left behind assets, lost their social capital, and livelihoods. A recent UNHCR Standardised Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) reported “Critical” levels of child malnutrition (wasting, stunting and anemia) amongst refugee children, specifically in refugee sites in **Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda**.² This situation comes in the wake of humanitarian funding shortfalls that have contributed to food ration cuts³ and amplified the cross-sectional protection needs of the most vulnerable.

1 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-regional-humanitarian-overview-call-action-revised-24-august-2022>

2 https://www.icpac.net/documents/572/IGAD_RRFC_2022_ONLINE_4eYMbKh.pdf

3 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120792>

A young boy fetches water for his livestock. Thousands of families have been displaced due to the recent climate change and drought in Ethiopia's Somali regions, leaving them without hope. Most families have lost their homes, livestock, and farmland.
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Key Protection Issues

While the multi-sectoral response to drought is focused on supporting critical nutrition, health, and WASH interventions, the ensuing serious protection crisis cannot be overlooked. Increased displacement, breakdowns in family and community support systems, child separation, and escalations in negative coping strategies contribute to growing protection, child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) risks. Protection delivery is challenged in terms of availability and accessibility to quality protection services owing to insecurity and limited humanitarian access. This is further complicated by utilizing a sedentary approach to protection on a non-sedentary population whose pastoral livelihoods require movement for the survival of their livestock and hence their own personal survival.

In the face of multiple competing emergencies, limited humanitarian funding and donor fatigue, protection delivery is unfortunately deprioritized and protection needs are unmet. Herein lies the protection crisis whereby traditional socio-economic mechanisms for protection are compromised and aid dependency arises. Protection delivery is imperative in order to save lives, restore the socio-economic structures of family and community who provide protection and empower them to utilize their proven resilience to continue active participation in the economy.

Conflict, Climate Change, COVID-19, and Cost of Living (4Cs)

Households and individuals living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts are at heightened risk of food insecurity. Community tensions are increasing due to competition over scarce resources. In **Kenya** and **Somalia**, pastoralists are trekking long distances to find water and pasture for livestock, leading to

inter-communal tensions and conflict. In the Ethiopian regions of Oromia (East and West Hararge) and Somali,⁴ severe water and food shortages, as well as loss of livestock, are increasing social tension in addition to the conflict in Northern **Ethiopia**. Further, anecdotal reports indicate that livestock price shocks in affected areas are often the result of this vicious cycle of escalating inter-communal violence, cattle rustling, and food insecurity.

The breakdown of the protection regime and rule of law in countries which are unable to provide adequate social services for their citizens heightens protection risks and further exposes women and young children, persons with disabilities and older persons, who remain behind as their communities engage in transhumance livelihood activities with their livestock. In **Somalia**, people are migrating to nearby towns, joining existing and already overcrowded camps for IDPs, or traversing dangerous distances controlled by armed groups and covered with unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in search of work or humanitarian assistance.

Vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is increasing as resources become scarce and food insecurity worsens. Within extremely limited options for livelihoods and shortages of essential items, including menstrual hygiene products, other sanitary items, and clothing, some women and girls are forced to cope by exchanging sex for food, water, and other basic needs. Across **Kenya**, a deeply concerning and unsustainable practice of incurring debt to access water and purchase essential goods has emerged, with female-headed households particularly affected. Exposure to multiple protection risks makes child rights monitoring even more crucial to inform preparedness and risk informed programming and advocacy.

⁴ Livestock is the main source of food and livelihood for communities across drought-affected areas.

Child Protection

Children are at particular risk of abandonment, separation, violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse. During drought, loss of family livestock and food scarcity puts a strain on economic livelihoods and leads many families to rely on children to secure their survival. As more children are either involved in child labor activities and/or separated from their families, school drop-out rates and cases of children living in the streets are likely to increase. The number of children at risk of dropping out of school across **Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia**, due to the impact of the crisis, has tripled within three months – leaving vast numbers of adolescent girls at increased risk of GBV including undergoing FGM and being forced into marriage. As a result of unregistered births or misplaced documents, children may be unknown to, or unable to access, protection actors and the services they provide.



A social worker in Melkadida refugee camp screens 6 month old Hamza for malnutrition using mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measuring tape. © UNHCR/Petterik Wiggers

In some communities in **Somalia**, for instance, families have stopped sending girls to school, prioritizing boys as they cannot afford the school fees for all children. In **Ethiopia**, protection actors report that boys from the ages 12-14 are leaving school as they are expected to join the men in search of food and pasture

for livestock or are at increasing risks of exposure to grave violations including, recruitment and use in the armed conflict.

Gender-based Violence

Risks of GBV, including sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse, as well as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are becoming more acute as displaced women and girls, living without the support of their traditional family network or other social safety nets, are forced to walk longer distances in search of food, water, and pasture. In **Somalia**, 56% of the women surveyed had to travel more than 30 minutes to safely access water increasing their vulnerability to violence. 34% of women reported that they had no access to safe latrines, and 58% had unmet menstrual hygiene needs.⁵ The same situation is witnessed in **Kenya** whereby makeshift shelters, unlit pathways to water and firewood collection points, and latrines provide limited to no security, heightening risks for assault.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable with child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) on the rise as families adopt negative coping mechanisms for survival. In situations of extreme strain on household income, many families aim to reduce their family sizes by resorting to child marriages and alleviate the economic pressures by obtaining alternative sources of income in the form of dowry. In **Ethiopia**, child marriage has increased by an average of 119% across regions worst hit by the drought – Somali, Oromia and SNNP – between January to April 2021 and the same period in 2022.⁶

GBV response services including clinical management of rape (CMR), case management and PSS are severely lacking meaning women and girls are unable to seek care and recover from violence and abuse.

Call to Action

The frequency and severity of drought in the region has eroded resources and families are taking desperate measures to survive. All stakeholders must recognize the multi-faceted protection needs of women and children, the elderly, persons with health difficulties, people with disabilities, and other minority/marginalized groups to ensure inclusive assistance delivery. As these vulnerable groups fall further behind, there is a tangible reversal of gains made towards the Sustainable Development Goals especially those focusing on women empowerment and education. Key recommendations for targeted action plans for the various stakeholders are:

⁵ While this is the latest figure available at the time of writing, it is likely that these are already outdated as the crisis evolves. Care Somalia (2021) Rapid Gender Analysis Somalia.

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-marriage-rise-horn-africa-drought-crisis-intensifies>

National Governments

- Strengthen access to and delivery of quality essential services for the most vulnerable, including food, nutrition, health, child protection, recovery programs for victims of gender-based violence, social protection systems, improved water and sanitation, and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure the most vulnerable children and families can access basic services safely and equitably.
- Create opportunities for national organizations or local actors including women-led and rights-based organizations, civil society actors and community-based structures to be included in key decision-making bodies that contribute to peacebuilding and safety for all.
- Ensure that all organizations and entities responding to the drought emergency adequately incorporate GBV risk mitigation in their responses to better protect girls, boys, women, and men.
- Engage conflict-affected communities in dialogues on durable peaceful solutions and increase security surveillance in drought-affected areas..
- Acknowledge heightened risks of child rights violations and other protection risks, including gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Thereafter, engage with communities to better understand their most pressing needs and ensure corresponding interventions.
- Spearhead funding appeals and advocacy for protection risks facing drought displaced communities

Donor Community

- Increase funding for both life-saving protection (e.g., child protection and GBV services) and protection mainstreaming (including protection monitoring and referral systems).
- Provide multi-year funding is essential to enable affected communities to be prepared and develop specific and positive coping mechanisms as climatic shocks are certain to repeat themselves.
- Mobilize additional humanitarian funding to address urgent and growing GBV and child protection needs. It is essential to ensure that funding is additional rather than diverted from other programmes or locations and supports specialized GBV and child protection services in drought-affected locations.
- Plan and budget for SGBV/SEA risk mitigation and inclusion of child protection and referral services in all sectoral interventions.

- Ensure funded programmes and interventions adopt Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) and Accountability to Affected People (AAP) approaches that target the most vulnerable and most at risk but also strengthen the resilience of families and communities.

Humanitarian Sector

- Protection Clusters and Protection Working Groups in drought-affected countries should facilitate information exchange channels amongst various Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) for effective advocacy on protection needs; ensure capacity-building on protection principles, GBV, Child Protection, PSEA, and community engagement for staff, partners including Government counterparts, and community volunteers; conduct protection monitoring; highlight deteriorating protection conditions and trends, and recommend good practices to support affected communities.
- UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs should scale up specialized GBV and Child Protection services, including case management and psychosocial support to women and children; community-based protection mechanisms and family tracing and reunification for unaccompanied and separated children; and implement GBV risk mitigation measures to improve women and children's safety and access to humanitarian assistance.
- UN agencies, RCRC Movement, (I)NGOs, Community-based Organizations (CBOs)/Refugee-led Organizations (RLOs) should strengthen coordination and leverage existing expertise to enhance service delivery and community protection across drought-affected communities. This may include one-stop GBV centers, Family Tracing and Reunification services, and improved access to education and child-friendly services. Adapting existing protection delivery methods to mobile protection delivery units may contribute to improved accessibility and quality of services and address the unmet needs of pastoral populations on the move.
- Allocate resources to coordinate and strengthen and/or establish accountability mechanisms such as common feedback mechanisms (CFMs) and community participation structures. Strengthen community leadership for protection and facilitate access to basic social services.
- Strengthen PSEA through setting up of community-based complaint mechanisms, access to survivor assistance, and capacity building of staff and partners.

Inputs for this note were provided by members of the Regional Protection Working Group comprising of:

