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Improving water security for livelihoods in refugee/host settlements in the Somali Region, Ethiopia

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Outline of presentation

- Research that was carried out in collaboration with UNHCR. Research questions and methods were co-determined. Data sources involved primary data collection at five refugee/host settlements at the border with Somalia and secondary data collection of reports and academic articles.
- Resulting report, “Water security and climate resilience in the Somali Region, Ethiopia: An assessment of the vulnerabilities of refugee and host communities” contains:
    - Overview of challenges in water security for refugees/host communities and how they affect livelihoods
    - Specific interventions UNHCR and others can take to enhance anticipatory action, climate adaptation, and economic resilience
    - Ways to operationalize recommendations

Challenges in water security

- Water supply
  - Strains on infrastructure and equipment
  - Disputes of control of water supply
  - Impact of flooding and drought
- Irrigation system
  - Constraints to expansion
  - Tension between host and refugee communities
  - Impact of flooding

Table 1. Characteristics of host and refugee communities and their effects on water security and climate adaptation capacity.

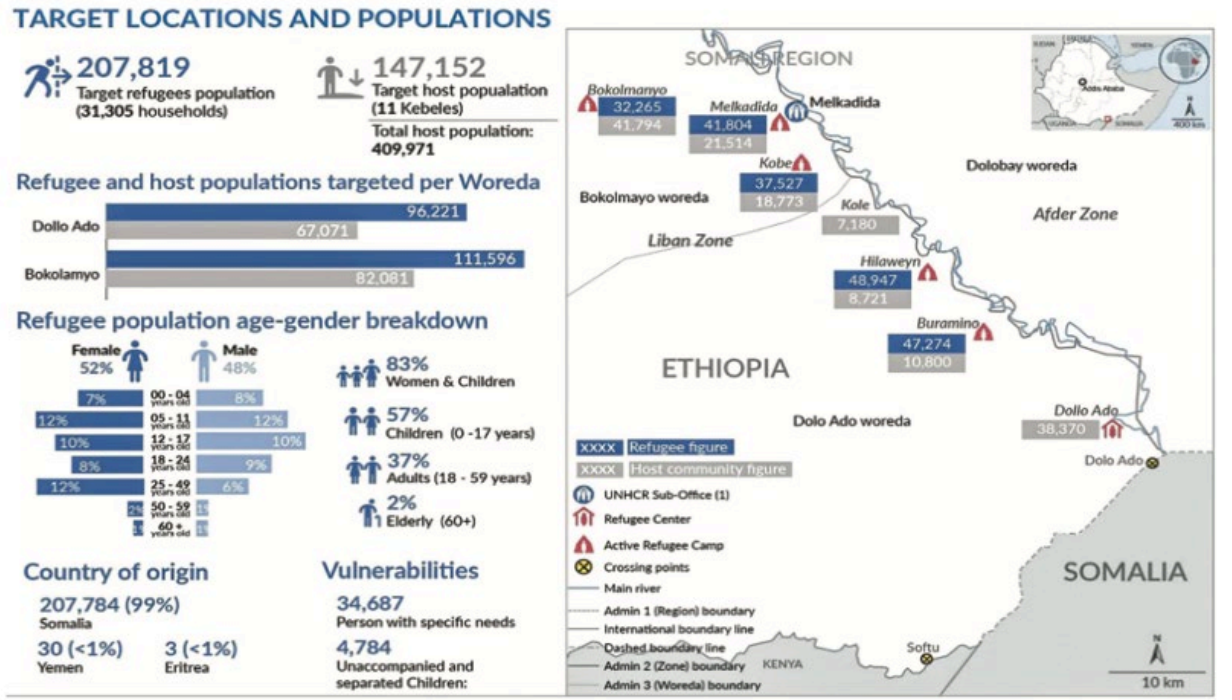
Characteristics	Description	Effects
Migration patterns	While host community members can migrate out of the area in times of drought, refugees are unable to do so. Therefore, host community members are more mobile and travel further inland than refugees. Refugees may consider returning to their countries of origin during certain times of the year, particularly considering the porousness of the Somali-Ethiopia border, where population numbers in the area constantly change.	Seasonal migration patterns in and out of the area require flexible and adaptive approaches for water supply and irrigation systems to be able to shrink or expand as needed.
Livestock ownership	Host community members have much higher numbers of livestock compared to refugee communities. This forms a key household asset that needs to be protected during emergencies. Refugee communities do not have the same level of dependency on livestock for their livelihoods.	Different levels of livestock ownership require different approaches to disaster preparedness between host/refugee communities.
Legal rights	Host communities are represented by members of the *woreda* and regional governments. Refugees, as noncitizens do not have such representation.	Participatory planning approaches can help improve the inclusion of refugees.
Humanitarian support	While host communities and refugees often face the same livelihood challenges, the latter are given much more attention and resources due to the humanitarian organizations operating in the area, which target services to those refugees. UNHCR's mandate, for example, is to protect refugees, and only by extension, host communities.	Humanitarian funding and support for refugee needs lead to substantially different levels of social protection and vulnerability for refugee versus host communities.
Unstable population numbers	Influxes of refugees or migrants may cross the border after sudden events, such as disasters or conflict. In these cases, the government finds it difficult to prepare for and cope with big changes in population. The unpredictability of the movements of forcibly displaced people also leads host countries to prioritize investment to serve the needs of legal residents and citizens.	Inability to predict future population numbers and associated needs complicates planning and programming for sustainable water system development and service delivery.
Tensions between refugess/ hosts	While the Somali Region generally has been open and accepting to refugees, tension between hosts and refugees sometimes escalates. Clan dynamics also sometimes play a role.	Responding to the different needs of refugees and hosts can give rise to claims of unfair or unequal treatment, and decreased engagement with government-led participatory planning efforts for development programming.

Sources: *(Petros and Dico-Young 2017; Betts et al. 2019; Alexion et al. 2021; Walelign et al. 2022; UNHCR, RRS and SRS 2024).*

Melkadida Refugee Compact

- UNHCR funding is decreasing
- Need to handover of responsibilities to the local authorities
- Melkadida Refugee Compact (MRC) developed, from 2024 to 2027.
- Objectives are to empower host and refugee communities, accelerate adaptation to climate change, and integrate humanitarian support with government systems
- Need for priority actions around anticipatory action, climate adaptation, and economic resilience

Figure 2. Refugee and host community populations at the border of Ethiopia and Somalia.



Source: *UNHCR; RRS; SRS 2024.*

Need for anticipatory action

- Develop mechanisms for water harvesting that can supplement water during dry seasons, reduce reliance on contaminated water sources, and alleviate the worst effects of flooding
- Protect essential infrastructure before emergencies. Transportation networks and water systems are vital to ensure food and water security after disasters. Proper sealing of latrines limits water contamination
- Combine traditional and modern forms of knowledge to improve information about water and climate risks and enhance community trust in forecasts.

Need for climate adaptation

- Develop multiple sources of water to decrease pressure on existing water systems and prepare for future population growth. Efforts to develop groundwater resources can be better directed to maximize investments

- Explore different types of water utility models to ensure the sustainable expansion of water supply systems. These models should be innovative and respond to the specific vulnerabilities in refugee hosting communities

Need to increase resilience to economic stresses

- Strengthen value chains to ensure the supply of relevant equipment and technologies
- Encourage innovative system development around solar energy to ensure local presence of necessary expertise and technologies
- Fill water sector gaps with local enterprise by building on existing institutions and enterprises. The population in the area is young and entrepreneurial, and several informal, community-led efforts can be better supported

New governance approach

- Operationalizing these recommendations entails a new governance approach
- Need to align with existing policies and legislation at national and regional level; report provides this
- Three focal areas: decentralization; alignment of capacity, resources, and needs; and resolve contradictions in humanitarian programming

Table 3. Aligning recommendations with policies and frameworks.

Recommendations	Enabling Policies and Frameworks	References
Identify prime locations for water harvesting	– Anticipatory Action Plan for Drought in Ethiopia (2020)	UNOCHA 2020
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999
	– Climate Resilient Green Economy National Adaptation Plan (2019)	GoE 2019
	– Somali Region Durable Solutions Strategy (2022-2025)	GoE 2022
Upgrade and protect key infrastructure	– Strategy on Disaster Risk Management (2013)	GoE 2013a
	– Guidelines for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk into Investment Decisions in Ethiopia (2017)	ADPC 2017
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999
	– Somali Region Durable Solutions Strategy (2022-2025)	GoE 2022
Raise community trust in climate forecasts	– Anticipatory Action Plan for Drought in Ethiopia (2020)	UNOCHA 2020
	– National Policy on Water Resources (revised 2021)	
Identify new sources of clean water	– One WASH National Program (2013)	GoE 2013b
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999
	– Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan in the Quest of the 2019 Gu Rainfall Failure and Floods in Somali Region (2019)	GoE and UNOCHA 2019
Explore innovative water utility models	– Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan in the Quest of the 2019 Gu Rainfall Failure and Floods in Somali Region (2019)	GoE and UNOCHA 2019
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999
	– Climate Resilient Green Economy National Adaptation Plan (2019)	GoE 2019
Develop and strengthen value chains	– Climate Resilient Green Economy National Adaptation Plan (2019)	GoE 2019
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999
	– Somali Region Durable Solutions Strategies (2022-2025)	GoE 2022
Encourage innovation systems around solar power	– Climate Resilient Green Economy National Adaptation Plan (2019)	GoE 2019
	– The National Roadmap for Scaling Up Productive Use of Renewable Energy (2023)	MoWE 2023
	– Somali Region Durable Solutions Strategies (2022-2025)	GoE 2022
Fill system gaps with local enterprise	– Durable Solutions Initiative (2019)	DSI-Ethiopia 2019
	– Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy (1999, revised 2021)	GoE 1999

Source: *Authors*

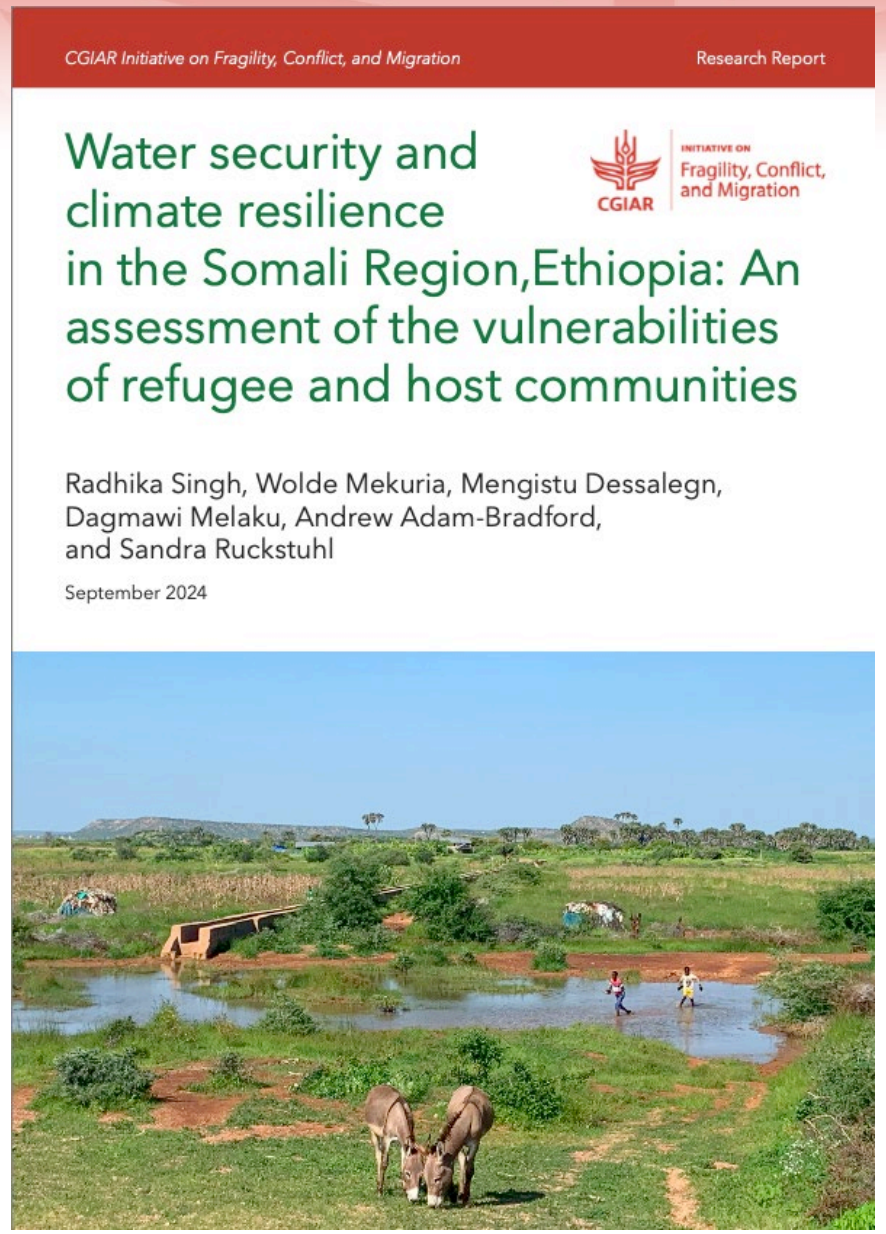
Operationalizing recommendations

- **Decentralization**
  - Centralized systems are more vulnerable to shocks and stresses and cannot respond to rapid population changes
  - Decentralization can reduce overdependence, allows for more context-specific governance, and increases efficiency
- **Align capacity and resources**
  - Certain actors are burdened with mandates they cannot feasibly carry out (e.g. IMC); not sustainable.
  - Existing capacity must be maximized, and resources are more realistically directed
- **Respond to contradictions in donor programming**
  - Need to relinquish developmental mandate to local actors
  - On the other hand, donors want to ensure monitoring, compliance and quality control

Next steps

- Developing a costed feasibility plan for implementing recommendations
- Attracting funding and investment for specific recommendations through MRC
- Coming to a consensus on and devise a new path forward for UNHCR's engagement in the area
- Establishing transition governance platforms that include relevant stakeholders, from local to regional levels
- Agreeing on governance strategies, accountability mechanisms, and roles and responsibilities across humanitarian and development programming

Contact

Questions? Suggestions?

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