

Forum: General Assembly

Issue: Addressing Drought-Induced Famine in the Horn of Africa

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa, comprised of Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Eritrea, is currently facing one of the gravest drought-induced famines in decades. A consequence of consecutive seasonal failure in rain, this is aggravated by the global effects of climate change. Once periodic events, droughts in the region have become larger, more frequent, and more severe, pushing millions into starvation and poverty.

As the crops wither and animals perish, food production has seriously dropped, leaving more than 20 million people in desperate need of food aid. Families are forced to migrate in search of food, with malnutrition, most severely amongst children, continuing to escalate. Economic stability has been irreparably damaged due to the loss of livelihood activities for farming and higher price levels for food that have escalated poverty and unrest.

Famine has also escalated existing social and political issues in the area. Displacement, competition for shrinking resources, and gender-based violence have increased, and humanitarian response is inhibited by security and logistical challenges. The crisis is both a humanitarian tragedy and a security threat to the region and a developmental regression.

It is imperative that multinational, sustainable, and long-lasting climate resilience responses are put in response to the drought-driven famine in the Horn of Africa. International society must coordinate responses that support food security, rebuild livelihoods, and buffer impacts that upcoming droughts will have.

Definition of Key Terms

The Horn of Africa

The easternmost extension of African land which is commonly recognized as including the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, whose cultures are linked throughout their long history.

Drought

A prolonged period of abnormally low rainfall, leading to a shortage of water.

Famine

An extreme scarcity of food.

Food Insecurity

The state in which people lack reliable access to sufficient, nutritious food.

Malnutrition

A condition caused by not getting enough nutrients from food, leading to stunted growth, weakness, and higher risk of disease.

Crop Failure

The destruction or loss of crops due to insufficient rainfall, pests, or poor soil, leading directly to famine.

Child Marriages

Any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age, which is often against one party's free will.

Internally Displaced Persons

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular because of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border

Background

Droughts in the Horn of Africa

Throughout history, droughts were far from rare in the region of the Horn of Africa. However, recently in the 21st century, these droughts have been intensified, due to the decimating effects of climate change and global warming. Climate change, one of the most severe humanitarian issues, has caused multiple extreme weather events such as wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, and floods. The Horn of Africa, an already arid region, has become extremely vulnerable to drought damages, with rising global temperatures disrupting rain patterns and shortening wet seasons.

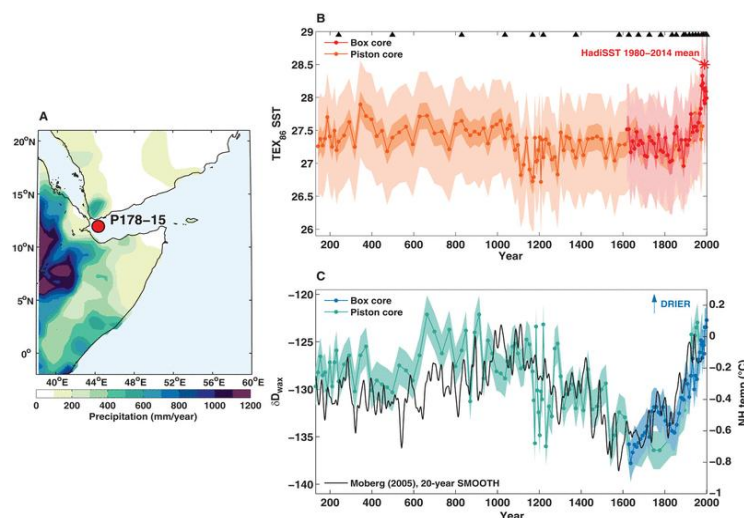


Figure 1: A trend graph tracking temperature and aridity proxy data from marine core site P178-15 in the Gulf of Aden (Science Advances)

As shown in Figure 1, the $\text{TEX}_{86}\text{SST}$ scale (measuring temperatures of sea surfaces), and the ∂D_{wax} scale (measuring the general aridity of a region) have both been increasing nearing the 21st century and start climbing exponentially at the 21st century point. This constant period of dry spells devastates local populations, destroying agriculture and leaving many in a state of food insecurity.

Drought-Induced Famines

Famines in the Horn of Africa are due to long droughts that kill crops and livestock—a principal source of food and income for many households. Without rain, crops wither away, green pastures become deserts, and supplies of food dwindle. Prices in markets for daily necessities consequently shoot up while purchasing power in family budgets disintegrates. Families are then forced to skip meals, migrate, or rely on food assistance to sustain themselves. Gradually, land degradation and income entrap communities in a cycle of poverty and famine and convert natural droughts into true famines.

Economic Concerns

The destruction of crops and livestock following the droughts has led to a downfall of the local economy, disabling many to act upon the effects of the famine. With agriculture and herding as the primary sources of income, this collapse has caused a sharp rise in hunger and economic instability. This creates a catastrophic cycle wherein damage continues to happen without any method of mitigation.

As per the World Food Programme (WFP), the number of people suffering from acute hunger at present exceeds 23 million and is getting worse mainly because of two reasons—rising food prices owing to the poor harvests and loss of income from cattle and sheep deaths within the households. During the years 2020-2023, drought led to the death of over 9.5 million animals, therefore, the loss of \$1.5 billion to herders. Their own low purchasing power makes countries like Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya depend on food imports more than ever. However, the conflicts on a global scale, e.g., the Russia-Ukraine war and the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, have not only disrupted supply chains but also raised prices. The price of wheat imports increased by 58%, meanwhile, inflation in Ethiopia rose to 31% and over 100% in Sudan, all this aggravated the situation and hundreds of thousands of people fell into the starving category.

Malnutrition

However, the children, and to a lesser extent, the rest of the population, are the major ones forced to pay for the health problems caused by famines. The less provided and thus, the higher immune-suppressed people are, the more they get sick. In the statement of UNICEF, in 2022, hospital admission of patients who were suffering from severe malnutrition increased in numbers by 37% in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. A major contributor to this was acute malnutrition which led to stunted growth and weakened resistance to diseases like measles and cholera due to poor nutrition.

Social Consequences

The famine has worsened numerous social issues throughout the Horn of Africa. Desperate for food, households are taking children out of school and getting their daughters married at a younger age in order to have less mouths to feed. UNICEF documented 15 million children were no longer in school and levels of child marriage had risen by over 50% since 2021 in 2022.

Women and girls are severely impacted, as they are the ones to feed and provide for family members. They have to travel long hours under hostile conditions to find food or assistance and are at risk of gender-violence, trafficking, and abuse. The famine is then not just a humanitarian tragedy, but a gender and social crisis.

Political Instability

Famine has also bred additional political instability in an already divided nation. Unavailability of resources has witnessed ethnic groups and communities fighting over cultivable land and grazing land. Civil wars such as the Tigray War (2020–2022), Oromo Liberation Army insurgency (2021–present), and Al-Shabaab cross-border attacks into Ethiopia (since 2022) also undermined famine response efforts. Political instability and insecurity have truncated humanitarian relief and severed food ties, rendering many millions in dire need of assistance. Drought-induced famine has thus been a stark local tragedy—a one that threatens not only human survival but also the fragile political peace that defines the whole Horn of Africa.



Figure 2: An image of the Al-Shabaabs in Ethiopia regaining land (Al Jazeera)

Major Parties Involved

Federal Republic of Somalia

Somalia has continuously experienced crime, famine, and military conflict. The Somali military has been fighting rebel groups since 1980, including the United Somali Congress, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, etc. In addition, the nation has been engaged in a battle with the group Al Shabab for almost ten years. Somalia's ongoing military conflicts and lack of political stability have exacerbated its food crisis: In 2022, the drought caused 4,300 deaths, with children under the age of five accounting for more than half of those deaths.

Ethiopia

According to the UN officials, over 20 million Ethiopians face severe food insecurity. Consecutive failed rainy seasons have devastated crop production and led to massive livestock losses, leaving millions of rural households without stable sources of food or income. Similarly to Somalia, Ethiopia has been in unstable political states, impeaching the government from taking any effective measures to mitigate the famine, calling for organizations to help aid in the area.

Djibouti

Although seldom receiving the attention its neighboring countries get, Djibouti has had its fair share of the water crisis. As a country that imports 90% of its food, Djibouti has been affected by the rise of global food prices due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other wars.

Eritrea

The Human Rights Watch reports widespread human rights violations in Eritrea, including forced labor and conscription, restricted speech, and expression, etc. Eritrea's political system also lacks a legislature and free or civil media outlets.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

One of the primary stakeholders in the relief effort for the Horn of Africa is UNICEF. In response to the water crisis, the nonprofit has issued a regional call to action. UNICEF has made investments in initiatives that offer facilities that facilitate safer and easier access to food. To lower the prevalence of diseases among malnourished children, the organization runs therapeutic feeding centers, provides emergency food rations, and gives access to a supply of clean water and sanitary facilities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

By enacting legislation, investigating human rights abuses, and offering social services, the UNHCR works to advance the rights and welfare of the displaced. UNHCR provides refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) with protection, food assistance, and shelter. The organization also collaborates with host governments to

offer basic services and humanitarian aid to displaced people while advocating for long-term solutions that lessen future displacement brought on by famine brought on by climate change.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1972–1973	Severe drought in Ethiopia and Somalia; early UN food assistance begins through WFP and FAO.
1983–1985	Major famine in Ethiopia; UN leads international relief coordination and launches large-scale food aid programs.
1999–2000	Regional drought affects over 10 million people; UN agencies initiate drought recovery and early warning programs.
2011	UN declares famine in Somalia; WFP, UNICEF, and OCHA coordinate emergency operations for 13 million people across the Horn.
2017	UN released Humanitarian Response Plan for the Horn of Africa, appealing for \$1.5 billion to support 15 million people.
2020–2022	Region experiences five consecutive failed rainy seasons; UN issues global famine warnings and mobilizes food, nutrition, and resilience aid.
2022 (March)	UN launches Horn of Africa Drought Response and Famine Prevention Plan, focusing on food, health, and livelihood support.
2023 (November)	UN reports that over 30 million people are food insecure; WFP and FAO expand emergency relief and resilience-building projects.
2024–Present	Continued UN engagement through climate adaptation initiatives and long-term recovery planning under the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- Strengthening the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations, 19 December 1991 (A/RES/46/182)
- World Summit on Food Security Declaration, 16–18 November 2009 (FAO Resolution 1/2009)

- The Humanitarian Response Plan for the Horn of Africa, 2011 (UN OCHA)
- Resilience and Food Security in the Horn of Africa Initiative, 2017 (Intergovernmental Authority on Development – IGAD)
- UNICEF Regional Call to Action for the Horn of Africa, 2022
- Global Food Security Resolution, 23 May 2022 (S/RES/2417)
- FAO Drought Response Plan for the Horn of Africa, 2023

Possible Solutions

- Financial support, if used adequately, can be an effective method of solution. Many attempts fail at a specific implementation of financial support, with details of amounts, location, and usage left unspecified.

Delegates may work towards a transparent and effective financial support system

- A direct chain of short-term food aid could save many lives, if targeted towards appropriate demographics and strategic locations. However, there should be attempts to transition into long-term solutions alongside these aids, as persisted short-term aid support is not viable.

- Delegates may target the root of the issue, droughts, through direct and indirect environmental efforts. These could span from local awareness programs to large scale anti-drought technology research and implementation.

- Delegates may need to target the issue from multiple points, combining local aid and efforts with external support from member states and NGOs. This could include an externally funded organization working within the local regions, providing more adapted forms of aid in different regions.

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