

# **Droughts in Somalia: A Looming Hunger Catastrophe**

## **A Humanitarian Situation Overview**

Somalia is on the brink of experiencing the deadliest starvation in decades. That could claim the lives of millions of people, if the situation continues like this without the necessary intervention from the international community. Since the beginning of this year, the drought in Somalia has worsened dramatically, and today we are witnessing a looming disaster in the country. Four consecutive rainy seasons have failed already, creating the worst drought in Somalia in at least four decades. At the same time, food prices have soared and humanitarian assistance remains out of reach for millions of Somalis as resources to meet their needs remain alarmingly limited.

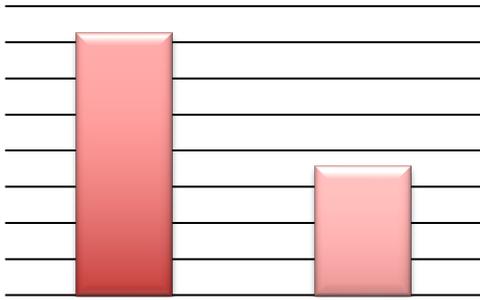
So far, the drought has affected seven million people, displacing one million from their homes<sup>1</sup>. Recently, some areas received moderate types of assistance, but these were not enough to alleviate the severe drought conditions. Now, there is an actual risk that the next rainy season could also be below average, and that would mark an unprecedented fifth consecutive failed rainy season<sup>2</sup>. Such forecasts exacerbate the situation further, into a deepening catastrophe. Therefore, there are fears that the drought will extend until mid 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> That data is taken from the analysis made by the United Nations in Somalia.

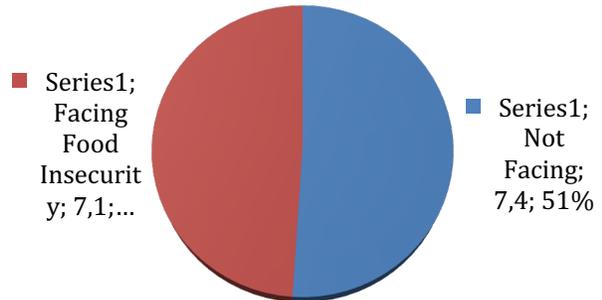
<sup>2</sup> The United Nations expects the "Dayr" rainy season will be below average. But the "Xagaa" rainy season could provide some sort of relief for southern Somalia. "Dayr" is summertime rain, while "Xagaa" is autumn.

Figure 1: Food Insecurity



Source: Own Calculations

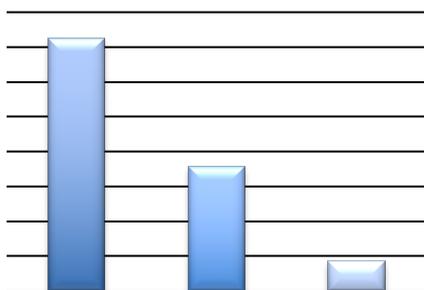
Figure 2: Percentage of the Population Facing Food Insecurity



Source: Own Calculations

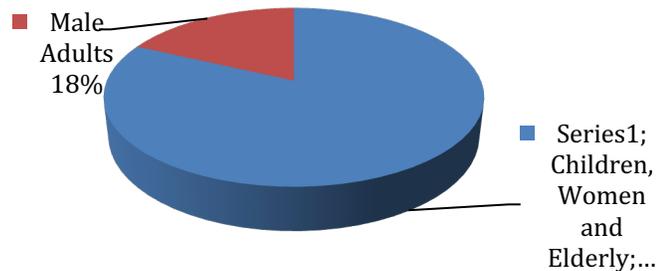
Already, all regions in Somalia are at increased risk of famine, particularly in the southern regions of the country, where insecurity and conflict make humanitarian access extremely challenging. Some of the updated figures provided by the United Nations show that 7.1 million Somalis are affected by the drought in some way or another. This amounts to nearly half of the population experiencing food insecurity or worse, and it is expected to continue in the coming months. For now, 1 million and 7 hundred people are facing hunger and starvation<sup>3</sup>. Women, children, and the elderly have been especially hard hit, accounting for 82% of all people displaced by the drought since January.

Figure 3: Assessing the Current Situation



Source: Own Calculations

Figure 4: Children as a Percentage of the Hungry



Source: Own Calculations

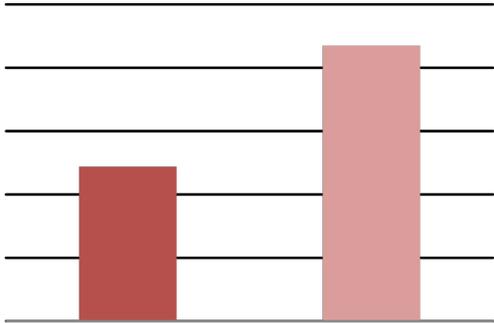
<sup>3</sup> Those numbers are estimates made by the United Nations in Somalia.

An estimated 1.5 million children under the age of five are suffering from acute malnutrition, with 386 thousand suffering from severe malnutrition; a 55 percent increase from previous estimates. Crisis is likely to worsen as the situation deteriorates further. Access to the people in need remains difficult for humanitarian agencies. The drought has also decimated livestock, a major source of livelihoods for so many families. As expected, around 3 million heads of livestock have died due to drought, and as expected, the decline in meat and milk production has aggravated the malnutrition situation, especially among young children in pastoral areas. Somalia is certainly heading towards a famine if action is not taken right now. Somali families are increasingly unable to cope with the high food prices as local food has become scarce.

**Diseases**

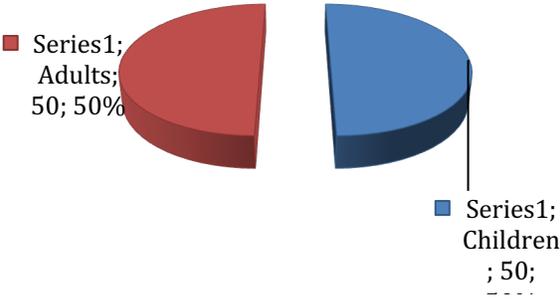
Drought has caused a health emergency and disease outbreaks continue unabated. Since January, over 4880 suspected cases of acute watery diarrhea and cholera have been reported by OCHA<sup>4</sup>. Half of these are children under the age of two. At least 8700 measles cases have also been reported, and that is 82 percent of children under the age of five. Severely malnourished children are nine times more likely to die of diseases such as acute water diarrhea, cholera, and measles.

Figure 5: Assessing the Current Situation



Source: Own Calculations

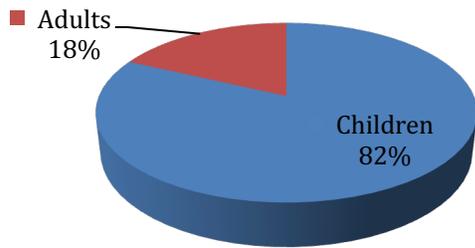
Figure 6: Children as Percentage in the New



Source: Own Calculations

<sup>4</sup> The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations

Figure 7: Percent of Children in the New Cases of Measles



Source:

Own Calculations

The latest data from OCHA shows that mortality rates are reaching high levels in some areas, especially in southern and central Somalia, which indicates the loss of life is already occurring. People are losing loved ones, especially children and the elderly. It is painful that the drought is destroying the lives and livelihoods of people whose coping capabilities were already eroded by decades of conflict and insecurity in the country. In addition to that, the rising food prices and supply shortages, climatic changes, disease outbreaks, the locus infestation and the Corona Virus pandemic exacerbated the crisis.

### ***Climate Change***

Somalia is at the forefront of countries that are impacted very severely by climate change, and what we see is a clear manifestation of what climate change could lead to. Now, the country needs a quick life-saving activity to prevent the same mistake in 2011 from happening again<sup>5</sup>. It is also important to do some climate adaptation interventions. Flash floods and annual droughts are only going to intensify unless sustainable solutions for the concurring problems are in place. We have seen an increase of threefold in the rate of droughts and floods over the past two decades compared to the previous two decades.

By 2080, temperatures are going to rise in Somalia by 3.5 to 4 degrees, and that would simply mean that the bulk of the Somali territory will become uninhabited<sup>6</sup>. That has to be factored into the UN's future programs and plans. Climate change and its awful impact on Somalia results in mass starvation and mass migration, and that also fuels local and trans-boundary

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<sup>5</sup> The 2011 droughts were one of the worst disasters in Somalia. 300 thousand people died at the time. Most of the dead were children under the age of six.

<sup>6</sup> That is according to some scientists and climate change experts. The United Nations expressed the same concern and warned that this could happen if drastic preventive measures are not implemented.

conflicts. As a result, the international community, east African governments, and Somali leaders and politicians must all take these factors into account.

### ***The Impact of the War in Ukraine***

Imported food prices have reached record highs. The supply chain of imported goods has been badly affected due to the crisis in Ukraine. Food prices have risen by up to 140 percent in some parts of the country, leaving poor families hungry and destitute. With regard to the impact of the Ukraine crisis on Somalia, there are several things that need to be pointed out. To begin with, Somalia used to import more than half of its wheat consumption from Ukraine, with the remainder imported from Russia, which is a bad sign given that Russia invaded Ukraine and wheat is the most versatile food, from which you can make pasta, bread, pancakes, and a variety of other dishes.

Secondly, the crisis in Ukraine has affected fuel prices and disrupted the supply chain, which is why there is a spike in the price of oil that affected countries like Somalia disproportionately because of the fragility of their economy and their dependence on informal import channels. The Ukrainian crisis has contributed to the rise in fuel prices, and that has led to a sharp increase in the prices of imported commodities in Somalia, which is estimated to be around 140 percent. Those are just a few factors among many others that worsen the already deteriorating situation in the country.

On the other hand, the UN and donor countries seem to be shifting their attention to Ukraine, at least for now, which leaves Somalia and other suffering countries in the dark. Hundreds of feeding centers as well as health facilities operated by the UN and its partners were closed down due to a lack of funding. There is no exact number of how many feeding centers have been closed and how many health facilities operated by the UN have been closed down because of the lack of funding. However, as some UN sources claim, WFP and its partners have reduced food and cash handouts to affected communities by up to 40%.

### ***Beating the Drum for Swift Responses***

For now, we, Somalis, need to help each other in beating the drum so that the world can understand the enormity of the crisis in Somalia. The East Africa Association for Research and Development is calling on the international community to act fast while we still have some hope of preventing widespread hunger, famine, and diseases. With additional resources, many more people can be reached. Without additional resources, more people will die.

This is not the time to wait for a formal declaration of famine. If that happens, it will be too late. The drought in 2011 should be a good lesson. Severe droughts resulted in a famine that claimed the lives of over a quarter of a million people in the country, and that was partly because humanitarian agencies were slowed down for formal procedures to be followed.

If the mistakes of the past happen again, hundreds of thousands of lives will be dead again. Donors, partners, and all international communities should immediately front load pledges and act right now to quickly scale up assistance to the needy Somali people to avert a hunger catastrophe.

### ***Measures to be Taken***

At the moment, it is vital that the humanitarian focus be on saving lives and averting famine. The international community, on the other hand, must also invest in sustainable livelihoods, resilience, infrastructure development, climate adaptation, and durable solutions to ensure that those affected by crisis can survive in the future. It is not too late to avert the looming famine. Lives and livelihoods can still be saved. But humanitarian agencies and the federal government need to act immediately to utilize the resources available. So far, humanitarian agencies have provided 2.8 million people between January and April this year, and that is with life-saving and livelihood assistance.

Thus far, the humanitarian community and national and local authorities have scaled up their activities, reorienting responses towards famine prevention and targeting the most vulnerable people in areas most in need. However, these interventions by humanitarian partners are limited and hampered by the lack of resources so far. The international humanitarian community is witnessing an unprecedented low level of funding.

The UN humanitarian response plan for 2022, which carries a price tag of 1.5 billion dollars, is insufficient and not enough to tackle the problem. The reality is simply that the scale of assistance currently being delivered and the funding from the international community are not sufficient to sustain those most at risk. Partners have shifted their plan to a famine prevention activity, but they are directing limited resources only to the people and areas where the need is greatest and focusing exclusively on life-saving activity.

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