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OUTSMARTING LA NIÑA

Lessons and recommendations for strengthening resilience through the drought response in the Horn of Africa

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La Niña is rearing its ugly head again. The effects of this weather phenomenon are driving one of the worst droughts in the Horn of Africa in a generation. For the communities affected, the drought is a grave manifestation of the climate impacts predicted in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. The drought has destroyed crops and decimated livestock, threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers and pastoralists. These impacts are exacerbated by, and in some cases further fueling, increases in conflict in the region. As a result, more than 13 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia are already experiencing extreme hunger.

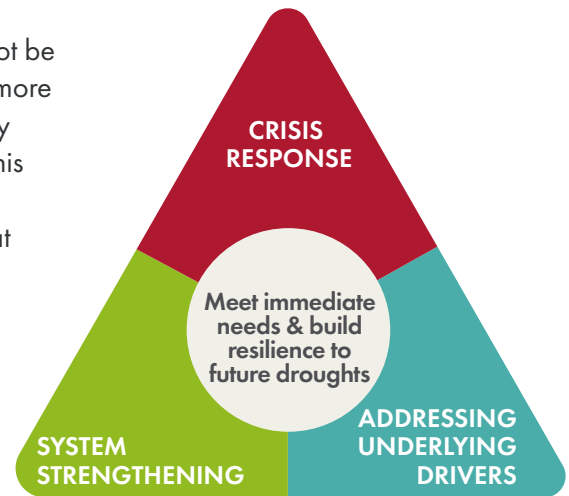
The worst is likely yet to come, with seasonal rains expected to be below average again this year—for an unprecedented fourth rainy season in a row. The number of people experiencing severe food insecurity is predicted to double, with the bulk in conflict-affected areas of Somalia and Ethiopia. In Somalia, a Famine Risk Assessment has been commissioned, signaling the potential for the drought to lead to widespread malnutrition and possible starvation there. Among those most affected in the region are women and girls, who in times of drought often bear the brunt of both the impacts on water and food availability, and the harmful mechanisms used to cope with the crisis.

This severe drought is one of the many shocks that have pummeled the Horn in recent years, including COVID-19, locust outbreaks, and devastating floods. Ongoing violent conflict and poor natural resource management have only compounded the effects of these shocks on people’s lives and livelihoods.

In many ways, those living in the drylands of the Horn are more prepared than in previous droughts. Governments, donors, aid agencies, and local communities have made major investments over the last decade to build resilience and end drought emergencies. These investments are helping to mitigate the worst effects of the current drought. It is critical that the current response protects and builds on these hard-won gains.

This is not the first drought to strike the Horn, and it will certainly not be the last. As the climate emergency escalates, the future will bring more frequent and severe droughts. We have the knowledge and ability to prevent them from escalating into humanitarian emergencies. This requires that the international response not only urgently address immediate needs, but also deepen investments in interventions that build communities’ resilience to future droughts.

Mercy Corps drew on multiple sources to identify how responses can achieve these dual aims, including years of experience responding to drought cycles in the Horn of Africa, insights from an expert roundtable we convened with policy and technical experts, and lessons from previous drought responses.



Recommendations

Donors, governments, and aid agencies should take urgent action to prevent the most devastating impacts of the drought at scale while strengthening commitments to resilience-building through a drought cycle management approach. This means responding not only faster to the current crisis, but smarter to prepare for the next one. Specifically, we call on humanitarian and development actors to:

- › **Harness proven tools**, such as prioritising the use of crisis modifiers or other flexible financing mechanisms as part of current and future drought responses. There is scope to significantly scale up and simplify their use across the region, and there is still time to do so in response to the current drought crisis in the Horn.
- › **Strengthen the formal and informal systems** that help communities prepare for, cope with, and recover from severe droughts. This includes supporting both formal and informal social protection systems and working through market systems during current and future crises.
- › **Address the underlying drivers of crises**, including climate change, conflict, and natural resource degradation. This includes increasing funding to climate-vulnerable communities in fragile and conflict affected states and increasing funding for peacebuilding, good governance, and social inclusion efforts as part of drought responses.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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