

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND ON FAMINE IN SOMALIA

The extent of the crisis in the region is extreme. Four consecutive seasons of drought have robbed people of their means of survival, over 3 million animals have died in Somalia alone since mid-2021, crops have repeatedly failed and families have been forced to abandon their homes and lands to seek food, water and pasture for the animals on which they rely for survival.

Many of the areas most affected by drought are also affected by conflict and violence. In Somalia there are 28 inaccessible and hard-to-reach areas where 1.7 million people are acutely food insecure. Insecurity and access constraints, are slowing and limiting the humanitarian response, and must be addressed by all parties.

One million people have been internally displaced in Somalia since January 2021 when the drought began. High-risk coping mechanisms are on the rise. Women and girls are among the most vulnerable, including those who are pregnant. Many girls have been forced out of school as families can no longer afford school fees and we fear that more girls will be married off earlier as families seek to cope with the worsening conditions. They require life-saving health and protection services amidst rising gender-based violence, child marriage and survival sex, along with complications at birth and maternal mortality.

A forecast fifth season of poor rains is unprecedented and will push people far beyond their meagre coping capacities.

New funds are needed now to respond to existing needs and avert a further escalation of the crisis. Food, cash, water, sanitation, hygiene and health services and nutrition support must be scaled up, together with urgent, time-sensitive agricultural support that are essential to survival (particularly saving the livestock on which these communities rely). Alongside these, immediate funds are needed for protection and gender-based violence programmes to ensure affected communities are safe from harm, as well as for camp coordination and management for refugees and the internally displaced.

Longer-term resilience building efforts complemented by smaller-scale anticipatory actions initiated since mid-2020 have helped some communities to hold out a bit longer, but the gravity of this current crisis has far outstripped the coping capacities of many families.

Drought does not inevitably lead to hunger. Tackling protracted food crises requires addressing the underlying causes of high acute food insecurity and recurring famines. Conflict and insecurity, increasingly extreme weather events driven by climate change and rising global food prices, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine are pushing millions more to the brink every year.

Investments in resilience and anticipating shocks are impactful and must be scaled up and sustained alongside the immediate response – their success so far highlights how much of this suffering could have been prevented.