

DANGEROUS DELAYS 2

THE COST OF INACTION





Diyaara stands among the carcasses of her family's livestock in Wajir, Kenya. [Photo: Khadija Farah/Oxfam/February 2022]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around the world, 181 million are forecast to be in crisis levels of hunger in 2022.¹ Oxfam and Save the Children estimate that across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, on average one person is likely dying every 48 seconds² from acute hunger linked to conflict, COVID-19, the climate crisis and inflationary and market pressures accelerated by the current conflict in Ukraine. Hard-won progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and millions of children's lives are now at risk if urgent action is not taken to avert famine. But preventing people from dying of starvation without political action to tackle underlying drivers – including inequality, conflict and the climate crisis, will not stop the cyclical – and predictable – crises experienced by millions of people around the world. Starvation is a political failure.

In 2011, Somalia experienced a devastating famine that killed over a quarter of a million people – half of them children under the age of 5.³ The international community failed to act in time, despite repeated warnings of an impending crisis. In the wake of the tragedy, leaders in the region made a commitment to end drought emergencies by 2022. The international community sought to ensure that there would be no repeat of the failures that led to

famine. Next time, the world would heed the warnings and act early, in anticipation, to avoid the crisis.

Yet, just over a decade since the 2011 famine, and despite various warnings and alarms over the past two years, the commitment to anticipatory action has proven half-hearted. We are once again responding too late and with too little to avert the crisis. Nearly half a million people across Somalia and parts of Ethiopia are facing famine-like conditions, with women being particularly affected.⁴ In Kenya, 3.5 million people are suffering crisis levels hunger, and UN predictions suggest that 350,000 Somali children may die by the summer if governments and donors do not tackle food insecurity and malnutrition immediately.⁵ The number of people facing crisis levels of hunger in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia has more than doubled since last year, from over 10 million to over 23 million people.⁶

The failure to accelerate progress on addressing the climate crisis and preventing conflict around the world is now perpetuating a system of reliance on humanitarian aid that was not designed – and is not resourced – to respond to cyclical and predictable shocks at such scale. With such rising needs we can no longer afford to wait

for emergencies to develop, we must act early and pre-emptively to prevent predictable shocks from turning into crises. This requires far greater collaboration between governments, development, humanitarian, peace and climate actors.

Oxfam and Save the Children have partnered with the **Jameel Observatory** to examine the changes in anticipatory action and response since 2011 in the Horn of Africa. The research team consulted national and local actors, communities and international actors on decision making and action in response to early warning information. The research highlights the impact of investment by national governments and local administrations in social protection, early warning systems, and the role of community members and local organizations in taking anticipatory action. However, it also shows that governments and international actors are still responding to the impacts of the drought, instead of managing the risk ahead of the drought, and are struggling to take action at sufficient scale in response to early warning information.

The research's key findings are not unique to the Horn of Africa. Communities and local actors are always the first to take action to protect their livelihoods and prepare for the impact of drought and floods, but funding to local organizations remains terribly low. Government-led social protection systems designed to shield people from shocks often offer both more cost-effective and earlier responses, but more needs to be done to ensure they are inclusive, child-focused and gender responsive, and linked with humanitarian cash systems. New initiatives to anticipate the impact of crises on communities show promise, but are not financed or integrated within humanitarian, development and climate action at the scale required to protect communities before a crisis unfolds. Entrenched bureaucracies and self-serving political choices – locally, nationally and internationally – also continue to curtail an anticipatory response.

It may be tempting to view the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine as one-off events. However, both shocks to the global system demonstrate the deep fragility and interconnectedness of the systems that millions of people rely on to survive. As we move deeper into the climate crisis, shocks from extreme weather and related factors – including the interplay between climate and conflict – will increase further. If current trends continue, the number of disasters each year globally may increase from approximately 400 in 2015 to

560 by 2030.⁷ A purely responsive system will not be able to prepare or respond to challenges in the years to come. For the 2022 hunger crisis we have once again been largely too late for anticipatory action – communities are now in the teeth of the crisis and only urgent funding for humanitarian response can save lives – but for the next crisis we must do better. This report recommends changes in both the systems around anticipatory action and how it is financed. This includes more direct funding to local and national organizations, consultation with community leaders, increased coordination between climate, development, government and peace actors, and a significant expansion of shock-responsive social protection systems and anticipatory action. Crisis modifiers and contingency budgets must be increased, but also simplified so as to allow the rapid dispersal of funds. Flexible, reliable, multi-year funding remains key, as does the genuine inclusion of women in decision making on responses at local, national and international levels.

A decade ago, we said never again to famine. To the millions of people who are once again on the edge of starvation we have failed in that promise. We must respond now, at scale, to avert further tragedy, but we must also learn the lessons of the past decade to ensure that next time we act pre-emptively to avoid the crisis. As climate catastrophe threatens a future of increased crises, we dare not fail that promise again.

THE WARNINGS WERE THERE

- The 2020 March-April-May (MAM) rain performance was poor in southern Somalia. By June or July 2020 anticipatory action could have been triggered.
- In August 2020, the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) alert projected that the coming two seasons would be poor, and were likely to drive high food assistance needs.
- In mid-May 2021, the Food Security and Nutrition Working Groups (FSNWG) called for urgent action and FEWS NET issued an alert that a multi-season drought would likely persist until late 2021.
- On 8 September 2021, Kenya officially declared drought in parts of the country a national disaster.
- On 31 October 2021, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) warned of an 87% probability of La Niña – for the second year in a row. This follows La Niña in 2016–17, when East Africa last faced a hunger crisis.
- On 23 November 2021, the Federal Government of Somalia declared a state of emergency due to the drought.
- In November 2021, FEWS NET issued a warning that an unprecedented drought was imminent in the region if the rainfall remained poor.
- In February 2022, FAO and WFP issued an early warning that acute food insecurity was likely to deteriorate further across multiple countries.
- In April 2022, an IPC Acute Food Insecurity Projection Update for Somalia warned of the risk of famine in some parts of the country, noting that food insecurity has drastically worsened since the beginning of 2022 and that ‘further and faster deterioration’ was expected through until at least June 2022. The World Meteorological Organization issued a stark warning:

“The very real prospect that the rains will fail for a fourth consecutive season, placing Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia into a drought of a length not experienced in the last 40 years...”

ENDNOTES

- 1 Global Report on Food Crises (GCFR) – 2022 accessed at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2022>
- 2 Details of calculations are shown in the Methodology section below
- 3 Mortality among populations of southern and central Somalia affected by severe food insecurity and famine during 2010-2012, A Study commissioned by FAO/FSNAU and FEWS NET from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, FAO & FEWS NET, May 2, 2013. Accessible at <https://fsnau.org/products/research-studies>.
- 4 The IPC Population Tracking Tool, accessible at <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/population-tracking-tool/en/>
- 5 United Nations. (2022, 8 February). Severe Drought Threatens 13 Million with Hunger in Horn of Africa. Retrieved 2 May 2022, from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111472>
- 6 Based on the IPC tracking tool comparing figures from May 2021 and May 2022
- 7 UNDRR. (2022). GAR2022: Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future. p.17. Retrieved 2 May 2022, from <https://www.undrr.org/gar2022-our-world-risk>