ON THE EDGE OF DISASTER
SOMALIS FORCED TO FLEE DROUGHT AND NEAR FAMINE CONDITIONS

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Summary

At present, Somalia remains in the chokehold of a severe, protracted drought. The Somali government, the United Nations (UN), and donor governments, including the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union (EU), deserve credit for acting early to address the risk of famine and avoiding a wide-scale loss of life. But the failure of the most recent rains and a third consecutive season of below normal harvest and pasture have prolonged the crisis and left significant numbers of farmers, agro-pastoralists, and pastoralist communities destitute. Worse yet, getting aid to many of the most affected areas has been a challenge due to the presence of Al-Shabaab and other non-state militant groups which often hinder or prevent aid delivery.

More than 800,000 people have been forced to flee in order to reach lifesaving assistance. Many of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) have gone to urban centers that are under the control of the government and African Union peacekeeping forces. In cities like Mogadishu and Baidoa, the humanitarian community is struggling to keep pace with thousands of new arrivals in a challenging operating environment. Many of the displaced are currently living in squalid conditions where they not only lack adequate food, nutrition, water, shelter, and healthcare, but also are exposed to risks that threaten their health and physical safety, including gender-based violence (GBV). The response requires improved coordination, especially at the regional level, in order to address gaps in services and the worsening conditions. Of particular concern has been the lackluster response by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to the serious and well-known protection risks IDPs face, given its role as leader of the protection cluster.

Moreover, given the persistence of the drought, sufficient additional funding is needed to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of IDPs, at least until the end of the year and to assist affected communities until the next harvest. Without additional funds – along with a rapid scale-up of a more coordinated, better informed, and timelier delivery of protection and assistance – the risk of famine will continue to loom.

Recommendations

To donor governments and organizations:

• Given the worsening of conditions on the ground, the United States, United Kingdom, the EU, and other donors must provide additional funding to support the humanitarian response at least through the end of 2017.
• Donor funding must support an integrated response and one that includes sufficient funding for urgently needed interventions, including protection, GBV mitigation and response, and improved camp management.
• In order to address the increasing impacts of climate change in Somalia and the growing humanitarian needs resulting therefrom, donors should continue and enhance support for resilience interventions in line with the country’s National Development Plan.

To the UN and other humanitarian agencies:

• With donor support, humanitarian agencies must immediately scale-up the response to meet the assistance and protection needs of the new IDPs who have fled drought-stricken and often insecure areas. This will require:
  • Improved assessments of the needs and vulnerabilities of newly-arrived IDPs, as well as the identification of gaps in services, through better collaboration and more transparent sharing of information both between agencies involved in the monitoring and profiling of IDPs, including UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and among humanitarian agencies involved in the IDP response.
More rapid and effective implementation of camp management activities (through the camp coordination and camp management, or CCCM, cluster) to address the extremely unsanitary and unsafe conditions in many of the newer IDP settlements and to help identify gaps in the provision of aid through improved mapping of IDP sites.

Under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) must immediately improve the response to the serious and pervasive protection risks IDPs face. Towards this end:

1. The RC/HC must establish a senior protection officer (SPO) position in his office to ensure that protection is fully integrated into the response.
2. With the support of donors, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) must appoint permanent GBV cluster coordinators at the regional level, particularly in Baidoa, Bay region.
3. UNHCR headquarters must dedicate more resources to and increase its focus on protection and assistance for IDPs.
4. UNHCR, in its role as leader of the protection cluster in Somalia, should conduct updated analyses and mapping of social and power dynamics amongst IDPs and their host communities to mitigate the marginalization of the most vulnerable.
5. UNHCR must ensure that refugees returning from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya (through the agency’s returns program) can sustainably integrate in Somalia and are not forced to reside in IDP camps in conditions that are worse than those they left behind.
6. The HCT must work closely with the federal, state, and local governments, development institutions, and in close consultations with IDPs themselves to start planning now for a local integration strategy for the many newly arrived IDPs who have fled to urban centers and who are unlikely to return to their home areas.
Background

The 2016/2017 Drought: A Deepening Crisis

Somalia’s severe, protracted drought has affected 6.7 million people, more than half of the country’s population. Since the Somali government and the UN first raised the alarm in November 2016 of a possible famine, humanitarian agencies, with the generous support of donors, have launched a large-scale response. The UN released an Operational Plan for Famine Prevention and, led by the United Kingdom, donors provided generous funding for the response, including towards the $1.5 billion requested in the revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). These actions undoubtedly helped to avert a repeat of the devastating 2011-2012 drought and famine that took the lives of more than a quarter of a million people.

But the crisis is far from over. The poor performance of the most recent March through June seasonal rains (known as the Gu rains) have resulted in a third consecutive below normal rainy season and in limited regeneration of pasture and water resources for pastoralists in central Somalia and very poor harvest prospects in most areas of southern Somalia. The preliminary results of the post-Gu rains food and nutrition analysis indicate that overall cereal production across Somalia is expected to be 40 to 50 percent below normal while livestock herds have been reduced by 40 to 60 percent. The number of people experiencing crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity is anticipated to increase between now and the end of the year, leaving significant numbers of people reliant on humanitarian aid to survive. Moreover, the lack of clean drinking water and poor hygiene and sanitation conditions in most of the camps, combined with food insecurity, has resulted in recurrent outbreaks of cholera and other waterborne illnesses, which at present continue to take lives at a rate that exceeds the emergency threshold. The combination of these and other factors, including ongoing insecurity and limited humanitarian access to certain areas under the control of Al-Shabaab, mean that an elevated risk of famine persists. In short, the country is hardly out of the woods.

Across the country, the drought has resulted in wide-scale displacement of rural communities whose livelihoods have been devastated. Additionally, violence between and among a multitude of actors – including Al-Shabaab, clan militias, African Union peacekeepers (AMISOM), and the Somali National Army – causes new displacement on a regular basis. Since November 2016, over 800,000 people have been displaced. Urban areas that have received the largest number of IDPs include Baidoa, in the Bay region of south central Somalia, and the capital Mogadishu – cities which already are hosting thousands of extremely poor and marginalized IDPs previously displaced by decades of armed conflict and prior droughts.

In July 2017, a team from Refugees International (RI) visited Somalia to assess the humanitarian response to the drought and meet with IDPs in Baidoa and Mogadishu to hear first-hand about their experiences, and to assess the situation in the most congested urban areas.

Urgent Need to Improve the Response to Drought-Related Displacement

Despite enormous efforts by humanitarian response agencies to deliver aid to food insecure populations, thereby mitigating displacement to distant or cross-border areas, the scale of displacement has been enormous – something for which the humanitarian community appears not to have been prepared. As one NGO worker lamented, “Probably fifty percent of the needs are not being met. The scale is too much to respond (to).”

“The rains failed year after year. We sold our animals and now we have nothing. We even sold our farmland to pay for transport to Baidoa.”
— IDP from Qoryole

“We had camels, cows, and many goats. But there was not enough water or fodder for the animals and many died. Then Al-Shabaab took some of them and slaughtered them to eat. I had only one donkey left. When he died, I came here.”
— IDP and single mother who recently fled Goof Gaduud with her seven children.
By late February 2017, IOM reported that 136,000 people had been displaced due to the drought. By the end of May, the number of drought-affected IDPs had surged to more than half a million people, with Baidoa reportedly hosting more than 142,000 in 247 informal sites, the vast majority of whom were from the surrounding Bay region. The return home of large numbers of drought IDPs starting in March with the onset of the Gu rains appears to have fed an assumption that most IDPs would return home. However, the failure of the Gu rains sent many back to urban IDP sites. As of July, the time of RI’s visit, more than 766,000 people had been displaced by the drought, with Baidoa and Mogadishu hosting 177,000 and 161,000 IDPs, respectively.

RI interviews with IDPs in Baidoa and Mogadishu revealed the extremely dire state in which many have arrived into these urban areas. RI spoke with IDPs who had walked for days and even weeks to access assistance in urban areas, having arrived with nothing more than a few belongings and the clothes on their backs. One local aid worker described to RI his encounters with IDPs whose family members died along the way. “It really affects me when I hear some of the stories, how they had to leave their parents – even their own children – on the road when they could go no further. But they had no choice if they were to survive.”

**Increased Malnutrition among IDPs**

The dire conditions in home areas and the toll of the journey are evident in the alarmingly high malnutrition rates among newly-arrived drought IDPs. According to the results of a recent nutrition survey, high levels of food insecurity persist in many IDP settlements with a majority of sites surveyed showing Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates above the emergency threshold (15 percent). In Baidoa, for example, a recent survey indicates that malnutrition rates among IDPs have doubled, while severe malnutrition rates have tripled.

Al-Shabaab controls (or at least has influence over) much of the rural area of south central Somalia that has been hardest hit by the drought and where humanitarian access is extremely limited. Deeply concerning are recent reports that Al-Shabaab has begun preventing some people from leaving their home areas until they are on the brink of starvation. RI interviews with IDPs indicated that, in certain areas, Al-Shabaab has been restricting outward movement. One IDP mother who had fled her home area in the Bay region with her seven children told RI, “Al-Shabaab didn’t want us to leave. We had to escape during the middle of the night.” According to another IDP with whom RI spoke, “Al-Shabaab said we could not go to Baidoa. So we told them we were only going to a nearby village. But then when we got there, we kept going.”

**Crowded and Unsanitary Conditions in Spontaneous IDP Camps**

In Baidoa, which has received the largest number of IDPs, humanitarian agencies and the local government appear...
to be struggling under the enormous caseload which has almost doubled the size of the local population. While the town is under control of the local government and AMISOM forces, thus ensuring a degree of access to IDPs, the operating environment remains challenging. IDPs are dispersed across more than 250 informal sites on private land, many on the outskirts of town in areas that have ongoing security challenges, making consistent access by humanitarians difficult.

At one of the newer spontaneous IDP sites that RI visited in Baidoa, more than 2,000 households were living side-by-side in makeshift shelters assembled with tarp, sticks, and clothing. Camp residents told RI that since there were no latrines, people were forced to defecate out in the open or in the bush. In addition, camp residents had no access to a consistent clean water point and were either reliant on occasional water deliveries by aid agencies or forced to buy water. As one local aid worker described, “People are living in conditions that no human being should live in.”

Given the insufficient access to clean water and overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at IDP sites in Baidoa and elsewhere throughout the country, it is not surprising that there have been repeated outbreaks of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) and cholera among newly arrived IDPs and host communities alike. Although the crisis is being managed through improved vaccination campaigns and water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH) interventions in certain crisis areas, the extremely poor hygiene and sanitation conditions in IDP sites must be addressed in order to stave off new disease outbreaks and avoid additional loss of life. The next rainy season in October will only heighten vulnerability to cholera.

Need for a Better Informed, Timelier, and Better Coordinated Response to Drought-Related Displacement

Across all sectors, humanitarian agencies are clearly struggling to keep pace with the massive influx of desperate, malnourished people, resulting in spotty and insufficient coverage and unmet needs at IDP sites across the country. This is particularly evident in Baidoa where a recent assessment of IDP needs across 168 informal sites confirmed that only 16 percent had received assistance and found key gaps in services and severe humanitarian needs especially in terms of food, water, and shelter. For example, only 21 percent of the IDP households that were assessed reported having access to nutrition services in the past three months. RI interviews at several camps in Baidoa confirmed that, aside from receiving nutrition biscuits on arrival and periodic food assistance from UN World Food Programme (WFP), many IDPs had received limited assistance.

On a national level, keeping up with the rapidly growing caseload of new IDPs who are spread out across hundreds if not thousands of sites, no doubt creates logistical challenges. In particularly volatile areas throughout south central Somalia, accessing informal IDP settlements is even more challenging. Even in urban centers like Baidoa and Mogadishu which are under government and AMISOM control many newly-arrived IDPs are forced to settle in areas at the outskirts of town due to the high concentration of IDPs. These areas are less secure and humanitarian staff working there are more vulnerable to attacks. In short, the operating environment for aid agencies is complex and dangerous.

Nonetheless, RI did note areas where there is room for significant improvement. First is the need for comprehensive profiling and data collection regarding IDP needs and vulnerabilities in order to ensure that assistance targets the most vulnerable households and conforms to the most urgent needs. Several existing displacement tracking tools are in the process of being revamped and augmented. UNHCR, through its partners, leads the Protection and Return Monitoring Network (PRM), a project that seeks to monitor displacement trends among both IDPs and refugee returnees from Kenya and elsewhere. IOM utilizes...
the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) which collects disaggregated data among IDP communities, including service provision (or lack thereof) at specific sites. Additionally, there are occasional deep profiling assessments of particular locations, such as those conducted by REACH, a joint UN/NGO initiative.

Each of these tools provides important displacement data on its own, but given the differences in metrics and data sets, together they fail to provide a complete picture due to overlap in some areas and gaps in others. UNHCR, IOM, the REACH Initiative, and other agencies involved in IDP profiling and monitoring must work collaboratively to address this problem, share information, and develop more intelligible data and information. IDP data and profiling information must be analyzed and presented in a manner that informs operational choices and ensures that aid delivery is as efficient, effective, and integrated as possible to achieve collective outcomes. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should lead this process with the support of the RC/HC.

In addition, at the time of RI’s visit and despite the existence of these tools, field interviews revealed that there was limited understanding among aid agencies on the ground about which organizations were operating in which IDP sites. Nor was there appropriate coordination to address gaps in services – even where there was consistent access. According to one humanitarian aid staff, “There’s a good deal of territorialism and flag-planting going on that is undermining a better understanding of where the gaps are.” At the onset of the drought, the UN established Drought Operation Coordination Centers (DOCCs) in key locations, including Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Garowe. The DOCCs provide important venues for bringing aid workers, UN officials, and local government representatives physically together to coordinate on the drought response. However, they cannot substitute for strong cluster leadership.

The decision in May by the HCT to activate the CCCM cluster is a positive step toward improving conditions in the camps. However, at the time of RI’s visit in mid-July, it appeared to be taking time for the cluster to have an impact on the ground. As the CCCM cluster gets up and running, there is an urgent need for it to conduct comprehensive IDP site mapping, analysis of site safety and security, and clarify and confirm ongoing aid provision at the sites. The
CCCM cluster will also play a key role in terms of working closely with government officials, landowners, and local power brokers to identify suitable sites for IDPs and help negotiate and advise implementing partners on complex issues around land and “gatekeepers” (see discussion on gatekeepers below).

**Increased Funding Needed in Order to Support a More Robust Humanitarian Response**

More broadly, there is an urgent need for humanitarian agencies to scale-up the response to meet these needs and for a better coordinated and more integrated response. In order to do so, however, more resources are urgently needed.

As indicated above, the response by donors has been generous. As of late July, close to $900 million has been received for the response, including $611 million toward the $1.5 billion requested in the HRP and $286 million for activities outside of the HRP. An additional $350 million has been pledged by donors to support the response until the end of October. While not the first to respond to the pre-famine warning, the United States is to-date the largest donor and has contributed a total of almost $337 million to the drought response. The majority of funds have gone through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)’s Food for Peace program, which has provided $219.9 million, and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) which has provided $81.7 million. Along with the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), a U.S. government-funded project that provides food security analyses and forecasting across the globe, U.S. government funding to Somalia for early warning and response has been instrumental in preventing a significant deterioration of food security as a result of the drought and ultimately, staving off famine.

But given the worsening of drought conditions, the United States and other leading donors, including the United Kingdom and the EU, will need to provide additional funding not only for food and nutrition but also to support other life-saving sectors such as WASH, health, and protection as well as for camp management activities by the CCCM cluster. They must be joined by non-traditional government donors, along with the World Bank, other multilateral development banks and the public. Without more funding to respond between now and at least the end of the year, the situation risks slipping backward and the important progress toward avoiding famine and human suffering may be lost. As one high-level UN official put it, “Let’s not stumble before we reach the finish line.”

**Urgent Need to Prioritize Protection of IDPs**

Serious protection risks prevail at IDPs sites that, to date, have not been sufficiently addressed. The operationalization of the CCCM cluster, in close coordination with the other clusters including WASH and protection, could go a long way toward addressing the unsafe environment that prevails in many of the new camps, especially in terms of providing latrines and sufficient lighting and avoiding overcrowding. But ensuring IDP protection is not the responsibility of the CCCM cluster alone. Rather, there must be an improved understanding among all sectors of protection risks and dynamics among IDPs which must inform aid delivery.

**Gatekeepers and Power Brokers**

Improving the protection response to newly-arrived drought-affected IDPs must start with an analysis of clan and ethnic power dynamics as it relates to vulnerabilities and aid delivery. Evidence from the 2011 famine and its aftermath indicates that most of its victims were from traditionally weaker clans and minority ethnic groups, including members of the Rahanweyn clan and Somali Bantus. As one aid official told RI, “Droughts do not affect people equally.” First, IDPs with weaker social connections in their areas of displacement are likely to maintain fewer connections to host community support compared to those that have strong local clan and family connections. Second, minority groups are vulnerable to marginalization through the very distribution of aid that is so urgently needed.

As RI previously reported, most IDP sites, particularly in Mogadishu (and ones that are both new and old), are controlled by gatekeepers – individuals or groups of individuals connected to landowners, government officials,
and/or militia leaders who manage access to IDP sites and demand as “rent” a portion of aid that IDPs receive. As analyses from Human Rights Watch and Tufts University explain, an added dimension is that gatekeepers are often connected to a region’s most dominant clan and have served to exploit displaced people from less dominant groups. In improving and scaling up the emergency response to the enormous new IDP caseload the drought has created, the aid community must be keenly aware of local power balances so as to avoid contributing to increased marginalization through the delivery of services. There is no easy solution to the gatekeeper situation, but at the very least, the aid community must develop a better understanding of the multitude of actors involved and seek to disconnect nefarious actors from the aid system.

The protection cluster, led by UNHCR, has a critical role to play in driving this analysis and, with the support of the HCT, informing the response to the current displacement crisis. Since RI’s visit, UNHCR has indicated plans to deploy an information management officer for the protection cluster to support data gathering and analysis. This is a positive step, as unfortunately, the overall IDP protection monitoring, analysis, and response in Somalia has been weak.

**UNHCR, Refugee Returns, and IDP Protection**

At the onset of the current IDP crisis, UNHCR was institutionally focused on facilitating refugee returns from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya back to Somalia through a returns program that began in December 2014. Since then, UNHCR has facilitated around 70,000 refugee returns to Somalia. With protection monitoring and programming resources dedicated to facilitating the reintegration of returnees (through a returns program that RI maintains is problematic and unsustainable), UNHCR has been slow to pivot and support a robust protection response to the hundreds of thousands of Somalis who have been displaced internally over the past several months. More concerning yet, despite the near doubling of the number of people who are now internally displaced in Somalia as a result of the drought, UNHCR, supported by donor governments, is continuing to return Dadaab refugees to Somalia. On a September 2016 mission to south central Somalia, RI found large-scale returns were not sustainable due to lack of basic services and livelihoods and noted that many returnees ended up in IDP sites and dependent on emergency aid. Additionally, nascent local governments with limited capacity were struggling to facilitate re-integration.

Since then, the humanitarian situation has obviously deteriorated precipitously, including in areas of refugee return such as south central Somalia, which has been hit hardest by the drought and ongoing insecurity. While RI was unable to confirm the exact number of refugee returnees who are now in IDP sites, numerous people with whom RI spoke indicated this was occurring at a significant scale. According to one aid worker, “The drought has impacted negatively on the majority,
if not all, the refugee returnees. Most of those refugee returnees are now again IDPs . . . following the drought. The majority wish they had not returned from Dadaab.” Certainly, any Somali refugee who wishes to return home voluntarily should not be prevented from doing so. But the ongoing facilitation of refugee returns to the devastating humanitarian conditions in their home areas and with the knowledge that many of them are likely to end up in IDP sites needs to be seriously questioned. Appropriately, returns to Baidoa have been temporarily suspended due to poor conditions in the region, but returns to Mogadishu and Kismayo continue. UNHCR must ensure that refugees returning from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya can sustainably integrate into Somalia and are not forced to reside in IDP camps in conditions that are worse than those they left behind.

At the same time, UNHCR headquarters must dedicate more resources to and increase its focus on protection and assistance for IDPs which, at the time of RI’s visit, was found to be seriously lacking. A 2015 report, “Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action,” commissioned on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Global Protection Cluster, found that “[w]hile UNHCR’s technical competence on particular protection matters is recognized and appreciated, there is a strong perception that UNHCR has not invested enough in its cluster lead responsibilities or in understanding the essence of protection in non-refugee settings.” This has been the case with regard to UNHCR’s IDP role in Somalia. To address this, RI supports the recommendation of the above-referenced Protection Review for a senior protection officer (SPO) to be established in the UN Humanitarian Coordinator’s office. The SPO would participate as a member of the HCT and work to support the priorities of the protection cluster to coordinate a more effective response to immediate protection needs. While all sectors must work collaboratively toward an improved protection response, stronger leadership of the sector is also required.

Unmitigated Violence against Women and Girls

More urgently, and compounding protection threats to marginalized groups, the conditions in many of the new IDP sites, as noted above, create an unsafe environment especially for women and girls, with shelters located very close together and virtually no lighting or latrines, let alone latrines with locks. According to a number of UN agency staff, in addition to intimate partner violence, perpetrators can come and go from IDP sites as they please, and when they are apprehended, they are rarely held accountable. According to RI interviews with agency staff working to combat GBV, incidents of GBV in Baidoa have increased precipitously – including alleged assault and rape by members of the security sector. According to one aid official, “Rape is happening on a regular basis in the IDP sites, but no one is talking about it.”

Addressing justice and security sector reform is a long-term challenge for Somalia. In the meantime, however, more must be done not only to monitor but also to prevent GBV against displaced women and girls. This should include reducing overcrowding in IDP sites, installing solar-paneled lighting and sex-disaggregated latrines, expanding health and psychosocial support for victims, and conducting regular GBV trainings for members of the security sector, including the Somali National Army, local police, and AMISOM.
On a positive note, UNFPA recently deployed a surge staffer to lead the GBV cluster in Baidoa, but it is only a three-month, temporary position. This is inadequate. UNFPA must deploy and donors must support22 a full-time regional GBV cluster coordinator to Baidoa (for South West State) and the other regions of Somalia, including Jubaland and Puntland. This is essential for ensuring coordination amongst GBV-response actors, as well as for collaborating with the CCCM cluster on implementing measures within IDP sites. This includes expanding GBV reporting systems and referral pathways and also interventions to mitigate and prevent ongoing protection risks.

Need for a Comprehensive Strategy to Address Drought Displacement over the Longer-Term

As indicated above, with the onset of the Gu rains in March through April, there was an expectation that many drought IDPs would return to their home areas. At time of RI’s visit, an early recovery working group had been convened to discuss the development of a six-month “return package” (e.g., cash, seeds) for IDPs who wished to return to their home areas. Yet based on RI interviews with numerous IDPs, it was questionable how many people were likely to return. If anything, the failure of yet another rainy season not only diminishes the likelihood of returns but also increases the likelihood of further displacement. A recent return survey of IDPs in Baidoa indicated that about half of those interviewed intended to stay.23

At the time of RI’s visit, there did not appear to be a coherent strategy among the HCT and the federal, state, and local governments for responding to the likelihood that many of the new IDPs are not going to return anytime soon, if at all. State government officials with whom RI spoke in Baidoa were eager to work with international agencies and indicated that they hoped to find government-owned land on which to situate newly arrived IDPs. But at the same time, the expectation was that IDPs would return as soon as pasture and harvest conditions allowed. At the federal government level, there was a greater acknowledgement that many of the IDPs – especially pastoralists who lost most of their livestock, people who had escaped from insecure areas, and youth – were likely to stay in urban centers where they had greater security and access to livelihoods. Restoring livelihoods for pastoralists whose herds have been wiped out by the drought will be especially challenging. As one humanitarian aid worker noted, “If they are a pastoralist and they are an IDP, I’m accepting that they are going to remain an IDP. They need 35 to 40 animals to get back into the game. That is $2,000 per household. We simply don’t have that kind of money.”

More attention, coordination, and planning are needed in order to meet the challenge of responding to drought displacement in a manner that promotes durable solutions and mitigates the risk of creating a large, new protracted caseload of IDPs in Somalia. As a prerequisite, a coherent strategy to address displacement from the drought will require that all those involved in assistance get on the same page about the long-term prospects of return and the likelihood that large numbers of newly displaced people may choose to integrate locally. A 2014 study evaluating the success of a pilot project to support the return of people displaced by the 2011 drought and famine found that the return package was insufficient to support a sustainable livelihood in home areas and that some family members returned to displacement sites.24

The good news is that ongoing efforts to address protracted displacement in Somalia provide a way forward. The Somalia IDP Solutions Initiative, launched in 2015 by the RC/HC and supported by the federal government (since expanded to include refugee returnees and host communities), lays out an inclusive framework for ensuring that IDPs in urban and peri-urban areas are able to access affordable housing, land, services, and jobs, and successfully integrate into host communities in a way that recognizes their human capacity.25 In order to implement the initiative, the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat in collaboration with local authorities has conducted “area-based durable solutions analyses” aimed

“Even if there is peace, we will not go back. We have nothing to go back to.”

— IDP in Baidoa
at mapping and assessing the needs and gaps in ongoing IDP integration and refugee reintegration programming in specific urban areas including Kismayo, Baidoa, and Mogadishu. At the time of RI’s visit, a “joint area-based durable solutions action plan” had been developed for Kismayo, and action plans for Baidoa and Mogadishu were being prepared based on these analyses. However, it was not clear to what extent these actions plans will incorporate the new drought-affected IDPs who decide to remain in urban areas or those who want to return home. It will be important for the action plans to include not only measures to address the enormous gaps in services for new IDPs but also a strategy for supporting them to either return home or integrate locally. In addition, more efforts are needed to ensure that the action plans are effectively implemented.

A Case for Resilience

Since the 2011 drought and famine, Somalia and its East African neighbors have been one of the largest testing grounds for the “resilience” agenda. Major donors, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the EU have provided significant multi-year funding for resilience programs in Somalia targeted at vulnerable communities. Both the Somali government’s National Development Plan 2017 to 2019 and the UN’s Revised Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 include resiliency components.

The current drought and its devastating impacts on many of the rural communities that have been the beneficiaries of resilience-building programs have presented an opportunity to measure whether resilience interventions have been effective in helping vulnerable communities to withstand shocks and in reducing humanitarian needs. The current crisis also presents an opportunity to modify existing programs to build on what is working and change what is not.

At the time of RI’s visit, there was some evidence that communities which had been the beneficiaries of resilience activities fared better during the drought. By supporting resilience-based coping mechanisms and strategies (e.g., establishing community warehousing of food stocks, fodder field school, and community savings and loans programs), many of the target communities were better able to maintain food security, preserve their assets, and avoid having to flee to other areas during the drought.

According to RI’s interviews, one of the biggest advantages to ensuring the success of resilience programs during the drought was the flexibility of the funding which allowed implementers to pivot to an emergency preparedness approach once it was clear back in June 2016 that the drought would be prolonged. In addition, having existing contracts in place with agencies implementing resilience programs allowed donors to quickly push out humanitarian response funds to affected areas.

Going forward, continued monitoring of the effectiveness of resilience programs will enable implementers, in consultation with communities, to adjust programming. It will also help dispel the continued skepticism among some members of the humanitarian community regarding the efficacy of the resilience-based approach and help build consensus based on outcomes. As one humanitarian aid worker involved in resilience programs explained, “Building resilience is not formulaic; rather,
it is an iterative process that requires flexible, multi-year funding in order to constantly adapt and expand." The alternative, not seeking to address the chronic vulnerabilities of Somalia's people and institutions is not an option. He added, "Somalia is not a humanitarian situation. It is a long-term, complex problem that we need to figure out how to solve. We know that we'll be here year in and year out. Separating humanitarian approaches from development approaches in Somalia is foolish.”

Putting the crisis in the longer-term context of climate change, which is already manifesting itself in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, further underscores the need for concerted efforts to scale-up resilience and prepare Somalia for more recurrent crises. When comparing the rainfall levels that sparked the 2011 famine to the current rainfall situation, it is difficult to draw blanket conclusions for the region. Nonetheless, according to data collected by the USAID-funded FEWS NET, drought conditions have persisted for longer than in 2010 and 2011, and in the worst affected areas – including south central Somalia – rainfall levels are the lowest in 36 years. (See map 1.)

More broadly, the region is experiencing pronounced changes in temperatures and rainfall patterns. Studies indicate that the Gu rains are weakening across the Horn of Africa. There is evidence that over the past several years, rainfall seasons and temperatures in eastern Kenya and southern Somalia have been drier than historic averages, resulting in drier conditions and decreases in available water for crops and pasture. These changes in the climate system are already having profound and irreversible impacts on the livelihoods of Somalia’s impoverished rural populations who largely depend on rainfall to survive. Keeping ahead of these trends will require striking a balance between ensuring mechanisms are in place to act quickly and early to mitigate the impacts of climate-related crises, while at the same time building resilience among government institutions and communities alike over the long-term. In addition, ongoing efforts to address severe environmental degradation and lack of water resources in rural areas must be prioritized in order to promote sustainable returns, mitigate future displacement, and bolster livelihoods.

**Conclusion**

By acting early to heed pre-famine warnings, the humanitarian community in Somalia and donors were able to stabilize what could have been a catastrophic situation. But a worsening of the drought – and the significant new displacement it has triggered – has only served to deepen vulnerabilities among affected populations. The humanitarian community in Somalia has a long history of responding to displacement, and Somalia has been a testing ground for both avoiding protracted displacement and building resilience to prevent it. In the face of the latest crisis, a better coordinated, more strategic, and better resourced response is urgently needed in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

*Mark Yarnell and Alice Thomas traveled to Somalia and Kenya in July 2017. RI shares a special thanks to the displaced people who shared their stories with us.*
Endnotes


8. According to the survey, GAM rates among IDPs in Baidoa have risen from 13.4 percent in December 2016 to 29.4 percent in June 2017, while Severe Acute Malnutrition Rates (SAM) rates have more than tripled in that time period from 3 to 10.4 percent. The crude death rate is 1.5.

9. IDP malnutrition rates in Kismayo, Dhibley, and urban areas of Kismayo and Mogadishu are also at serious levels. UNOCHA, “Humanitarian Bulletin,” supra n. 3, at p. 2.

10. These numbers are not far off from famine thresholds which are 30 percent for GAM and two deaths per 10,000 persons per day for crude death rate. Supra n. 7.


12. Since January, over 71,000 cases of AWD/cholera were reported in IDP sites, host communities, and rural areas affected by the drought, resulting in more than 1,000 deaths. Supra n. 3, at p. 3.


22. Unfortunately, the U.S. government has cut all funding for UNFPA. Nichols, Michelle, “U.S. withdraws funding


28. While the concept of “resilience” is used across a wide array of sectors and has numerous definitions, most donor-funded resilience programs aim to provide different types of services to help vulnerable households and communities build the assets and skills necessary to enable them to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks and stresses including weather-related crises and conflict. See, e.g., “Resilience at USAID 2016 Progress Report.” https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/082816_Resilience_FinalB.PDF.

29. See, e.g., Concern’s factsheet on the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) program, which is implemented by a consortium of NGOs with funding from the UK and EU, was able to monitor and gather evidence. Concern Worldwide, “Tackling food crisis in Somalia: How resilience programming has reduced the impact of the current drought,” at p. 4.


These displaced women and their families recently arrived in Baidoa having fled drought and conflict. “We cannot go home. All of our animals are dead.”