



Hawa Seid with one of her two children, collecting water supplied by Oxfam to an internally displaced persons (IDP) site in Siti zone, Somali region, Ethiopia. Credit: Abiy Getahun/Oxfam.

EL NIÑO IN ETHIOPIA

Programme observations on the impact of the Ethiopia drought and recommendations for action

Ethiopia is facing a massive drought and food insecurity crisis as a result of failed rains and droughts that have been worsened by the 2015 El Niño, which in itself has been supercharged by climate change. Urgent humanitarian action is needed *now* to support millions of people who have lost food, water and livelihoods, and long-term investment is needed so that communities can become more resilient and reduce their vulnerability to weather events in the future.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is facing a massive drought and food insecurity crisis. The trigger for this has been a combination of failed rains and droughts that have been worsened by the 2015 El Niño,¹ which in itself has been supercharged by climate change. Urgent humanitarian action is needed *now* to support millions of people who have lost food, water and livelihoods. As the climate becomes more extreme, vulnerable communities also need long-term assistance to become more resilient and to ensure food is grown and shared more equitably.

Oxfam has been responding to humanitarian crises and long-term needs in Ethiopia since the 1960s and is currently scaling up its response to this crisis. This briefing draws from Oxfam's water, sanitation and hygiene promotion and emergency food security programme response in Somali, Afar and Oromia regions. It aims to highlight the critical issues people are facing in terms of access to water, food and livelihoods support. It also makes recommendations to donor governments, the UN, the Government of Ethiopia and implementing agencies on how to address these immediate needs and support families to get back on their feet, in addition to tackling the underlying drivers of food insecurity and the long-term impacts of climate change.

2 CONTEXT

Ethiopia is in the middle of one of the worst droughts for 50 years,² which has left many poor and vulnerable families with nothing. The El Niño weather system, exacerbated by climate change, comes off the back of 12 to 18 months of erratic or failed rains. It led to crop failures of the 2015 *meher* harvest of between 50 and 90 percent,³ particularly in the eastern part of the country, and has dried up many water sources. Hundreds of thousands of livestock have died and malnutrition is at alarming levels. Pastoralists in Afar and Somali regions were some of the first and hardest hit. Pastoralists who have lost income, livestock and access to food and water are migrating and congregating in sites near villages and towns where they hope to have access to water. The government estimates that 27 percent of people in Somali region (1.5m people) require food assistance.⁴ Some areas in these regions are already at IPC level 4,⁵ classified as 'Emergency'.

The Government of Ethiopia is providing leadership in this response. It undertook several assessments during 2015, has given a clear steer to regional authorities to scale up their efforts and as of 12 February 2016 had released \$381m of its own funds to respond to the situation.⁶ In December 2015, it launched the 2016 Humanitarian Requirements Document (HRD) calling for \$1.4bn to support 10.2 million people in 2016, over and above the 7.9 million people who will be supported through the government-led Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). This assessment of needs assumes that the *belg* rains (expected March to May) will be normal in early 2016, which will replenish some of the ponds and wells, and provide pasture. Even with the *belg* rains, however, food security will remain a critical issue through 2016, especially as the next harvest is not until May/June; without the *belg*, the numbers of people needing assistance will escalate rapidly.

Through direct programming and working with long-term partners, Oxfam is aiming to assist 777,000 people in Afar (zones 1, 2 and 5), Somali (Fafan and Siti zones) and Oromia (West Arsi zone), but requires a further \$18.5m to help reach this ambition. Oxfam's programme plan includes:

- improving water access through emergency water trucking and rehabilitation/upgrading of existing water facilities (hand-dug wells, boreholes, water schemes);
- latrine construction, provision of hygiene items and hygiene promotion in displacement sites and communities;
- cash to families through 'cash for work' and unconditional cash programmes;
- animal destocking and providing the meat to vulnerable families;
- providing animal fodder and seeds for the *belg* and *meher* planting seasons;
- recovery activities for when the rains fall, such as restocking of livestock.

Oxfam is also delivering long-term resilience programmes which include:

- working with pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in the Somali region to build more secure livelihoods, develop contingency and disaster management plans, and improve women's position socially and economically;
- working with government locally and nationally to strengthen and roll out disaster management practices, and ensure a strong integration of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation into development programmes.

3 THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

One of the common refrains Oxfam hears from the communities where it works is: 'this is the worst drought we have experienced for many years'. The stories are truly heartbreaking: families talk of how water and pasture ran out in 2015, so they herded livestock to Somaliland and/or Djibouti – only to find dry, barren land. Their animals didn't survive the return journey. People have lost their source of income and have become almost wholly reliant on humanitarian aid, forced, out of desperation, into internally displaced person (IDP) sites. The HRD estimates that by December 2015, 124,000 people had become IDPs in Somali region. In the Fafan zone of the Somali region, a recent joint assessment predicted that by the end of January 2016, many more people would lose the last of their food and water reserves.

'What good is land, what good is soil without water? I say the most significant problem is water. But my wife thinks health sites must be built. If someone gets sick, we have to take them to Hadigala [more than 100 km away] for treatment.'

Abdi, a farmer who came to the Fadeto IDP site with his family at the end of 2015.

Case study: The impact on livestock



Buho Asowe Eye at the Hariso IDP site, Siti region, Ethiopia, December 2015. Photo: Abiy Getahun/Oxfam

Buho Asowe Eye is currently staying at Hariso IDP site in the Siti zone of Somali region. Buho used to have 200 sheep and goats and 10 camels – they were her means of income. She used them for food (milk) and cash (selling the animals). She bought sugar, salt, and clothes with the cash. Most of Buho's animals have died due to a lack of water and pasture. She now only has one camel and ten sheep and goats.

'The water is retreating deeper and deeper [when wells are dug]. Only Allah knows when it is going to come back. We are afraid it won't. We live by water, our cattle live by water. Without water we are no more. If we can sustain our lives, it is because Oxfam gave us water. I mainly spend my days [at the IDP site] collecting firewood and cooking. Collecting firewood can take four hours of the day. Sometimes more than that. My greatest fear is if the trucks stop bringing water. What will happen to us?'

WATER

Access to water is a critical issue in this crisis. In the areas where Oxfam is working, 92 percent of all water sources are reliant on rainfall. Many of these have now gone dry. In a recent joint assessment in Fafan zone,⁷ improving water and sanitation was seen as the highest priority, along with improving food, livelihoods, health and nutrition. When there is little water left, the water is muddy or often contaminated, as animals and people use the same water points. Oxfam's rapid assessments indicate that most people do not have access to water purification methods, and hence are at high risk of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea.

While there are *some* boreholes (sometimes pumping water from 250m deep) there aren't many; the ones which do exist are being overused and many need repairs. In Fafan zone a recent joint assessment reported that 30 percent of the boreholes are not functional, and in one district, 13,500 people are relying on one borehole for water.

These challenges mean that emergency water trucking and rehabilitation of water facilities such as boreholes have become the main water interventions. The Government of Ethiopia has allocated some resources for water trucking. Funds have also been redirected from its long-term donor-supported ONE WASH development programme⁸ to help with the immediate repairs of boreholes. These contributions provide much needed additional resources. However, the task at hand is massive, and while these are the right activities for the immediate situation, water trucking is not sustainable or cost-effective. Oxfam currently spends \$50,000 to \$75,000 per month on water trucking for up to 3835 households, sometimes trucking water as far as 200 km (round trip) to reach people in desperate need. If the *belg* rains fail, this will hugely increase the pressures on short-term solutions. Long-term solutions are needed alongside immediate life-saving interventions. These include drilling new boreholes, continuing to repair and rehabilitate existing boreholes and water systems, strengthening community-level maintenance systems to ensure fast repairs, and expanding rainwater harvesting systems. Ultimately, a comprehensive and organized plan for water supply is required, based on scientific and traditional information, with community consultation as these plans are developed.

FOOD AND LIVELIHOODS

Ethiopia currently has a shortage of food which is driven by the large crop failures across the country. In Somali region, which is mainly a pastoralist area, this is compounded by a lack of pasture and water, which means livestock are dying or their condition is reduced. This, in turn, means people are losing their income and are not able to buy what little food there is and do not have valuable milk and meat supplies.

In Oxfam's recent field assessment in Siti zone, many people told us that their only source of food is the food aid being distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP). The recent joint assessment in Fafan zone predicts that over the next 6 to 7 months of 2016, food aid will be the main source of food for poor households. Food is currently distributed through three channels: the PSNP, which delivers a mix of food aid and cash; WFP; and INGO consortia funded by USAID. In Oxfam's Siti zone assessment, one issue identified was that the wheat being distributed as part of the food aid requires grinding for it to be eaten. Families are either doing this themselves with a mortar and pestle, or women travel between six hours and four days by donkey to access milling services. Households are selling part of their wheat to pay for milling since they do not have any other source of income. Milling costs up to 75birr, or \$3.75, for 50kg of wheat, which can feed a family of five people for one month.

Preparing for the next planting season (due to start in March) and the main planting season (due to start in June) is key. Seed reserves are severely depleted and the UN estimates that there is a 50 percent increase in identified seed requirements for nearly 838,000 households.⁹

Pastoralists' livestock has been badly affected by the drought. Many people Oxfam has spoken to in the Somali region have lost almost all or all of their

animals, often during the migration from Ethiopia to Somalia and/or Djibouti and back again. Of those animals still alive, many are now too weak for vaccinations. Without animal fodder and water, these animals will die. Already, many IDPs have lost approximately 90 percent of their livestock – a big blow to their incomes – meaning people have very little or no money to buy other essential items they need. This will also impact their livelihoods for the long term. In several cases people have told Oxfam that, to prevent total livestock loss, they are sharing the food aid with what little livestock they still have, meaning they are getting less than their basic daily nutrition requirements.

Where markets are functioning, cash is a fast and efficient means of providing support to families, and provides more choice as well as an alternative income source so that families can diversify their diet and improve their nutrition. Cash based interventions also stimulate the local economy.

Oxfam is currently completing a market assessment in Siti zone to better target cash assistance through its programme. Early findings indicate that some commodity markets are still functioning, but might start collapsing for a number of reasons including low local purchasing power. In most places, the price of livestock has plummeted as the condition of the animals is so poor, while the price of meat has almost doubled. Butchers are now selling 1kg of meat for 120–150 birr (\$6 to \$7.50) on average instead of the usual 70–80 birr (\$3.50 to \$4). In the areas where Oxfam is working the traders' price for sheep and goats has halved from 800 to 1200 birr (\$40 to \$60) to 400 to 600 birr (\$20 to \$30). In a typical year on average, a pastoralist family of six would sell three or four sheep and goats to buy enough food for the month; now they cannot sell even one in a month. Instead they rely 100 percent on food aid. Under normal conditions, women, children and men would eat three meals a day but this has now decreased for many households to one meal for women and men and two meals for children.

During the Oxfam assessment, people told Oxfam that they are buying food on credit or borrowing money to buy food, which is leaving them with increasing debts. In some cases, lenders have stopped loans to families where they have no prospect of repaying the money. This needs to be addressed as otherwise future cash distributions or restocking of animals will (at least in part) be passed on from debtors back to creditors and limit the speed of recovery of the affected families.

THE IMPACT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

It is vital that protection risks are monitored and addressed as part of the response and while some government assessments have addressed the impact of the drought on women and children, a more comprehensive analysis is required to ensure the response caters to their needs. Despite this, it is clear that the drought is putting a massive burden on women, particularly elderly, pregnant and breastfeeding women, who have to walk ever longer distances to find firewood, water and food for their families and livestock. It also means women are more likely to be absent during distributions, which is particularly problematic for women-headed households. The Fafan joint

assessment reports that it is common to find that women have left their children behind to drive their remaining herds farther and farther away from families, with implications for children's protection. There are also reports that families have been separated as some households send their children to live with relatives in bordering countries as a coping strategy. The Fafan joint assessment also reported that, according to the Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, some young women are moving from rural areas to towns, where they are either living with relatives or by themselves. Field assessments also indicate that children are starting to drop out of school as a coping strategy. At the peak of the drought in 2011, school dropout rates in Ethiopia were up to 50 percent in affected areas,¹⁰ severely impacting children's prospects.

FUNDING FOR THE RESPONSE

A quick scale-up of the humanitarian response is essential to save lives and prevent a loss in development gains, and resources are a key part of this. As of 12 February 2016, the GoE's 2016 Humanitarian Requirements Document appeal of \$1.4bn was 48 percent funded (\$709m). Donors and the GoE are to be commended for releasing funding so quickly. However, with food and water shortages rapidly increasing, further funding must be found. If needs are unmet, the costs will simply escalate, and so delaying is a false economy.

Key sectors for investment¹¹ are as follows:

- Food aid currently has a shortfall of \$695m, which is a 58 percent gap. On 28 January 2016, WFP announced that it needs \$500m immediately if the food pipeline is to be maintained after April.¹²
- Agriculture has a shortfall of \$33m (a 71 percent gap). On 15 January 2015, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced an emergency roadmap (costed at \$50m) aimed at assisting 1.8 million farmers and livestock keepers, reducing food gaps and restoring agricultural production and incomes in 2016.
- WASH has a shortfall of \$46m (a 63 percent gap).
- Nutrition has a shortfall of \$49m (a 42 percent gap).
- Health has a shortfall of \$33m (a 98 percent gap).
- Protection has a shortfall of \$10m (an 84 percent gap).

Flexibility in funding is also required to respond to the changing context. Should normal or above normal *belg* rains arrive on time, programming will be scaled back in some areas (e.g. access to water) and scaled up in others (animal health, animal restocking). If the rains don't meet expectations it is likely that much of the current programming would need to continue and expand.

With so many humanitarian crises requiring funding at the moment, humanitarian aid budgets are stretched thin. In 2015, the global humanitarian appeal was only 49 percent funded.¹³ For the Ethiopia drought, time is of the essence to prevent further escalation of humanitarian needs, and so donors and GoE are urged to provide both humanitarian aid and funding for the response. This funding should be channelled through a variety of implementation mechanisms (national and international NGOs, GoE, and UN agencies) to enable a quick scale up across the country.

TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE VULNERABILITY

Food insecurity has deep, structural and multi-causal roots. Assistance and livelihoods recovery is absolutely necessary to save lives and livelihoods. However, given that 80 to 85 percent of people are practising rain-fed agriculture,¹⁴ this will not be enough to reduce the vulnerability of the population to these cyclical events in a significant and sustainable manner.

The 2015 El Niño is likely to be followed by record temperatures in 2016. It is also possible that there will be a La Niña,¹⁵ whose impacts can vary widely, but which contributed to the 2011 Horn of Africa drought. Hence, this current crisis is not a short-term one – it is typical of future events and our understanding of ‘normal’ needs to be reset. The steps taken by the GoE government recently to develop and implement new disaster management systems and structures are a welcome first step, but given the challenging context facing Ethiopia, the GoE should review its progress on implementing these plans and identify any additional measures required to ensure there is a speedy and strong integration of climate resilience and disaster risk management plans into development processes at all levels.

In the long term, we need to address the root causes of climate change to limit global warming. At the Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015, countries agreed to limit warming to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to keep warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. But the commitments they have so far made to reduce carbon emissions will not be enough to meet this target. All governments need to do more but rich countries must take the lead in ending their use of fossil fuels.

In Paris, rich countries also committed to significantly increase adaptation finance above current levels.¹⁶ Oxfam believes that funding for adaptation remains far below what it should be and that the Paris conference missed an important opportunity for setting quantified targets. Despite this, governments need to start delivering the extra funds promised in Paris to help communities adapt to climate change, so that they bounce back better able to cope in the future. These funds should be available to all developing countries, with priority to those highly vulnerable to climate change, including many countries affected by El Niño.

The GoE has shown great leadership by setting out an ambitious programme for development which produces less greenhouse gas emissions, called the Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy. Now there needs to be a concerted effort by the GoE, with the support of the international community, national organizations and the private sector, to ensure this plan is realized in practice.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase funding for the response from development, adaptation and humanitarian funding sources and ensure flexibility to respond to changing contexts

Donors should provide further funding for the drought response as a matter of urgency, drawing from humanitarian and development funding sources.

Donors are also urged to channel funds through a variety of implementation mechanisms (national and international NGOs, UN agencies and the GoE) to ensure the response as a whole can scale up as quickly as possible, making certain that there is flexibility to allow programmes to adapt to the changing situation over the next few months.

Donors should also start to deliver on commitments made at the Paris Climate Conference in December 2015 by providing increased adaptation financing beyond current levels to support the most vulnerable countries like Ethiopia in tackling the immediate drought situation, adapt to the ever-changing climate and reduce risks associated with climate-induced disasters (such as drought).

2. Strengthen livelihoods and water supply assistance in the short and long terms

a. Implement more permanent water supply solutions alongside immediate life-saving activities

Donors and the GoE should provide resources to scale up short- and long-term water supply solutions simultaneously. In addition to the current funding for borehole repairs and rehabilitation and water trucking, this should include borehole drilling; borehole rehabilitation together with pipe network extension in areas of surface water shortages; strengthening community operation and maintenance systems; and expanding rainwater harvesting networks.

b. Maintain the food aid pipeline and publicly and regularly share information on the food aid pipeline and distributions

Food aid donors, WFP, the GoE and implementing actors distributing food aid need to ensure the pipeline is maintained without interruption well into 2016. Given that there is a 120-day lag between funding being secured and food being distributed, donors should rapidly provide funding to meet the remaining needs. The GoE and UN should ensure that the regularly updated information on the status of the pipeline and resources needed, along with details of the distributions of food aid, should be publicly available and widely shared on a regular basis to ensure that other initiatives (such as cash) can be effectively planned, implemented and coordinated.

c. Support markets and cash programming

The GoE, UN agencies, donors and implementing organizations should, where markets are functioning, support initiatives to assess market capacity, provide funding to support cash transfer programmes and ensure strong coordination of cash initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts. Cash programmes should be periodically reviewed to assess impact.

The GoE, UN agencies and implementing organizations should also support traders to keep their businesses viable and offset the debts being run up by

families to pay for food, to ensure people are not burdened with paying off large debts long after the drought has passed.

d. Help farmers prepare for the next planting season and support families relying on livestock for income

Given the shortage of food, it is essential that farmers are ready for the next planting season. The GoE and implementing agencies, with support from UN agencies, should distribute seeds and other agriculture inputs (e.g. small-scale, life-saving irrigation facilities) immediately, if they haven't already begun. Otherwise, the season will be missed and support will be required for many more months.

The GoE, the UN and implementing agencies should continue animal fodder distributions, especially for breeding stock, and support activities such as destocking to help households salvage some income from the sale of livestock that would otherwise die because of the drought. It is also important to start preparing for livestock restocking once the next rains fall.

e. Ensure programming is gendered and responds to protection threats

Implementing agencies should ensure that distributions of water, food and non-food items (NFIs) take into account the times of day when women are available to receive aid, and ensure that women-headed households are part of beneficiary lists, given their vulnerabilities.

Implementing organizations and the GoE should conduct multi-agency, comprehensive, rapid gender participatory assessments by facilitating discussions with women, girls, boys and men on gender and their needs; the underlying causes of vulnerabilities; their capacities and opportunities; and proposed solutions to addressing their needs.

The GoE, the UN and implementing agencies should disseminate (and develop if required) protocols to integrate gender-based violence prevention and response actions.

3. Long-term approaches to tackling climate vulnerability are essential

Once the drought breaks, the GoE should review the scale and speed of implementation of the new national and sub-national disaster management structures and systems (in line with the national disaster management policy), and identify additional measures that are required, while also strengthening the integration of adaptation and climate resilience into these structures.

Communities and local organizations should also identify the ways they want to build their resilience and the measures they think are needed to improve disaster management, and work with the government to ensure these activities are supported.

The international community, private sector, national organizations and the GoE should continue to work together to deliver the Climate Resilience Green Economy programme, and the GoE should also identify new and additional sources of finance to support initiatives which reduce the long-term vulnerability of communities to the changing climate.

Rich countries need to reduce their use of fossil fuels to limit warming to well below 2°C, in line with commitments made at the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, and to pursue efforts to keep warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

NOTES

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- 14 Government of Ethiopia and United Nations. 2016 Ethiopia Humanitarian Requirements Document.
- 15 El Niño, La Niña and the Southern Oscillation.
- 16 Under the Paris Agreement, the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC “strongly urges developed country Parties to scale up their level of financial support, with a concrete roadmap to achieve the goal of jointly providing USD 100 billion annually by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation, while significantly increasing adaptation finance from current levels” UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.21, para 151

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