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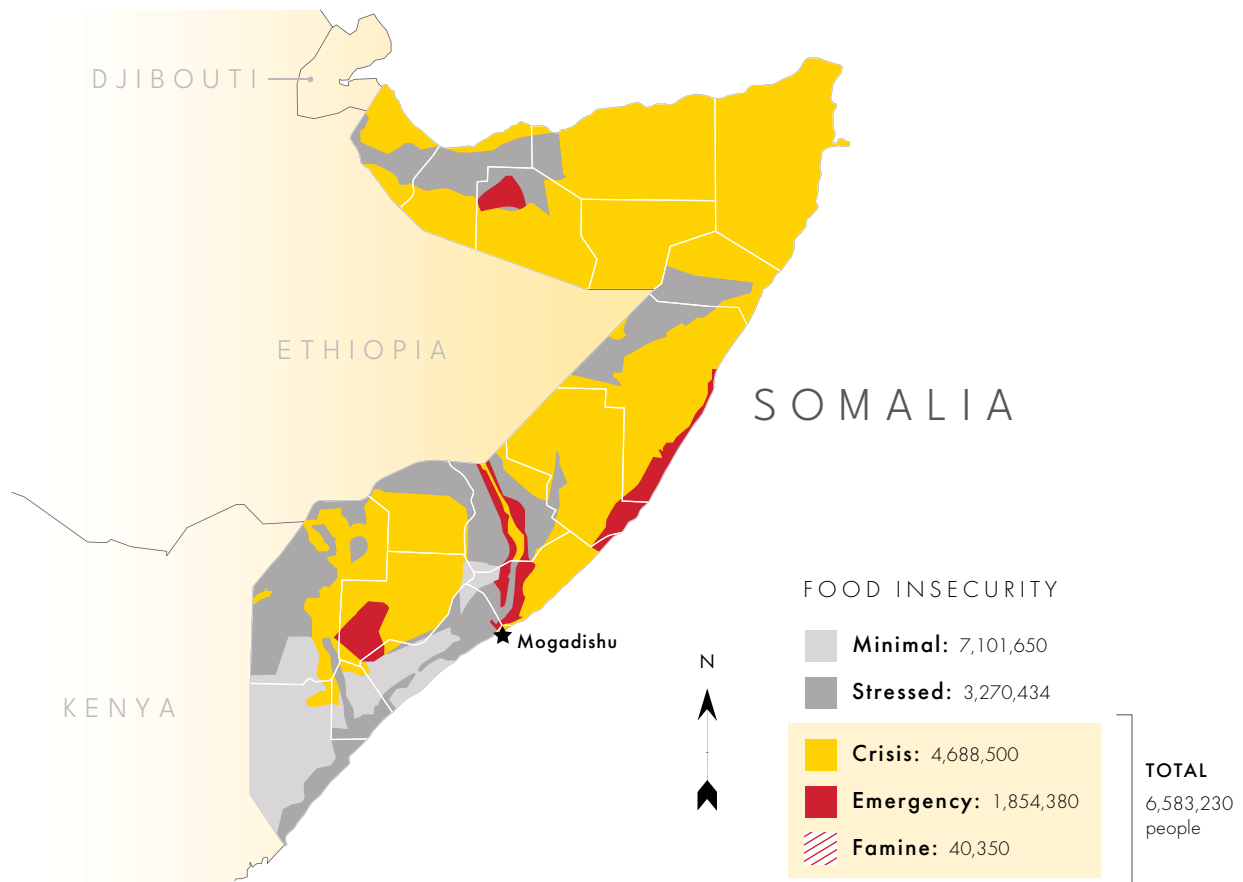
# **Saving Lives & Building Resilience**

**Evidence on how we can do both  
as Somalia emerges from drought**

MAY 2023

# Executive Summary

Communities in Somalia are facing a deepening humanitarian crisis following five consecutive below-average rainy seasons in parts of the country, a climatic event not seen in the last 40 years. Although many parts of Somalia have recently received rains, this was accompanied by devastating floods in some areas, offering little respite after two years of intense drought. The crisis is far from over with an estimated 6.6 million people across Somalia still in need of immediate lifesaving humanitarian and protection assistance (**Figure 1**). This unprecedented drought is the latest in multiple, compounding shocks facing Somalia and the Horn of Africa. These shocks include exceptionally high food prices and shortages due to the war in Ukraine, ongoing insecurity and conflict, and the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.



**FIGURE 1:** Somalia: Severity of Food Insecurity

Source: Somalia projected food insecurity April-June 2023 (IPC 2023)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IPC (2023). Somalia: Acute Food Insecurity Situation Projected April - June 2023. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

Experience from other parts of the Horn of Africa demonstrates that drought does not have to lead to a humanitarian emergency if appropriate, preventative action is taken. In Kenya and Ethiopia, major investments have been made over the last decade in building resilience, such as through strengthening livestock market systems, financial services, animal health services, and natural resource management. We know that smarter investments in resilience today will avert a more costly response to future shocks. Despite this, donors and governments continue to respond in Somalia largely via short-term humanitarian funding. While urgent humanitarian response is critical to save lives and prevent a worsening situation, humanitarian response alone will not solve this complex crisis in Somalia.

Calls for investing in strengthening longer-term resilience in Somalia are not new. However, few of them provide sufficient, evidence-based examples of how to translate that ambition into practice. This research brief aims to fill that gap, which is of heightened importance given the scale of humanitarian need as Somalia emerges from drought. We draw on multiple sources of evidence and learning on what matters for building resilience in Somalia, including recent findings on the impact of the current drought and what is helping households cope with it.<sup>2</sup> The findings have immediate, actionable implications for donors, governments, and organizations implementing humanitarian and longer-term programming in Somalia.



**Specifically, we call on humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors to:**

- › **Mobilize sufficient funding to scale up immediate responses to provide humanitarian relief. Simultaneously, increase investments in longer-term recovery and resilience to reduce the risk of future hunger crises in Somalia.**
- › **Ensure responses strengthen vital sources of resilience that communities rely on to manage major shocks. In Somalia, these include informal social protection, access to capital and markets, and opportunities to diversify livelihood and income sources.**
- › **Address key underlying drivers of crises and resulting humanitarian need in Somalia. Specifically, increase longer-term funding and action for climate change adaptation, and advancing peace and good governance.**

<sup>2</sup> This includes research in 2022 carried out by the [Somalia Resilience Population-Level Measurement \(RPM\) Activity](#), insights and recommendations from Mercy Corps' humanitarian and development programming in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, and a literature review of published and unpublished studies on resilience in Somalia.



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## Background

### IMPACTS OF THE DROUGHT – PERSPECTIVES FROM THOSE MOST AFFECTED

The intense and unprecedented drought in Somalia has had a devastating impact on Somalia’s population. Recent evidence from Somalia found households have experienced total or near total loss of livestock and agricultural resources and assets, resulting in high reliance on external assistance for survival.<sup>3</sup> Households adopted negative coping strategies to survive the drought, such as reducing food consumption, taking their children out of school, and engaging in risky or environmentally-damaging livelihood activities such as charcoal burning. There is also evidence of the drought’s secondary effects, including those that increase household and individual vulnerabilities like child marriage, divorce, and intimate partner violence. Women and girls have been particularly hard hit due to their existing vulnerabilities, gender-based discrimination and inequality, and are at increasing risk of hunger and malnutrition, loss of income, and gender-based violence.

Conditions were described as most severe in more isolated districts like the agro-pastoral areas of Baidoa. Households that have described more dire conditions—such as high rates of severe malnutrition among children and pregnant and lactating mothers—are often more geographically isolated, located further away from urban towns where resources and services are more readily available. The depletion of potable water sources and food requirements has driven many to leave their communities for urban centers and internally displaced person (IDP) camps, breaking up communities and households and disrupting important informal support networks. Respondents described waiting as long as possible before splitting their households or leaving their communities.

<sup>3</sup> Research carried out between May and September 2022 in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, Wanlaweyne, Hudur and Wajid Districts through the [Somalia Resilience Population-Level Measurement \(RPM\) Activity](#).

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*It became harder to cope with the drought after our food was finished and we lost our animals. Then it forced us to leave our beloved location to areas where we hoped to get support. Now we are vulnerable with no support, and we are unable to cope with the current drought.*

—Male focus group participant, Dondardir IDP camp, July 2022

When displaced, people have experienced perilous journeys, often resulting in the tragic loss of family members along the way. Cramped conditions and poor infrastructure in IDP camps have led to the spread of water-borne and communicable diseases, including deadly outbreaks of cholera and measles, and aggravated malnutrition, especially among children.<sup>4</sup>

It is expected that 1.8 million children under five are likely to face acute malnutrition through mid-2023, including 477,700 who are expected to be severely malnourished.<sup>5</sup> Recent analysis suggests that the drought has already resulted in the deaths of over 40,000 people, half of them under the age of five years.<sup>6</sup>



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4 UN News (2023). [WHO reports exponential rise in cholera cases in Africa.](#)

5 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2023). [Somali: Acute Food Insecurity Situation March 2023 and Projection for April-June 2023.](#)

6 WHO (2023). [From insight to action: examining mortality in Somalia.](#)



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## Key Findings & Recommendations

Evidence, experience, and insights from the Somalia crisis point toward three clear shortcomings of the collective response. We outline each of these below, along with recommendations for donors, governments, and implementing organizations to meaningfully address them.

### **1 Funding for the Somalia response is too late, too small in scale, not reaching where it is most needed, and not reducing the risk of future crises**

#### FUNDING HAS BEEN TOO LATE

An urgent humanitarian response is needed and is critical to save lives and prevent a worsening situation. Warnings of severe drought were forecast in early 2020,<sup>7</sup> and the risk of famine from June 2022.<sup>8</sup> Extensive analysis has shown how and why these predictions failed to translate into early action.<sup>9</sup> Donors and governments as a whole did not muster the political will to heed these calls, despite their commitment to never let famine occur again.<sup>10</sup>

7 OCHA (2020). *Somalia Climate Update: April 2020 Monthly Rainfall and Vegetation Cover (NDVI)* (Issued May 18, 2020).

8 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2022). *Somalia: Acute Food Insecurity Situation May 2022 and Projection June to September 2022*.

9 Farr, E. et al. (2022). *Dangerous delay 2: The cost of inaction*. Save The Children / Oxfam.

10 Action Against Hunger (2023). *NGOs Call for Urgent Reforms to Famine Prevention*.

The international community is fully aware of what happens when there is a late response to a devastating drought—in the 2011 Horn of Africa crisis and famine in Somalia, late response resulted in over 250,000 deaths due to starvation and malnutrition. We know how to avoid such crises.<sup>11</sup> It is widely accepted that, in comparison to 2011, famine was averted in 2017 in Somalia owing largely to earlier, more flexible, and multi-year funding that allowed a more effective response to the drought.<sup>12</sup>

## CURRENT HUMANITARIAN FUNDING IS INSUFFICIENT

The scale of the response has not matched the scale of the crisis. Given the multiple competing global humanitarian crises, including in response to the conflict in Ukraine, resources are stretched and funding is falling far short of the magnitude of needs in Somalia. Significant funding gaps remain in the international response to the ongoing drought and hunger crisis. Only 23.7% of Somalia's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2023 (total requirements US\$2.60bn) is funded to date.<sup>13</sup> In recent months the scale up of resources for lifesaving support by USAID and other donors has increased, however much more is urgently needed to match the needs.

The majority of funding to Somalia has come from USAID, which has consistently contributed at least 50% of Somalia HRPs in recent years.<sup>14</sup> USAID has so far funded 78.9% of Somalia's HRP for 2023.<sup>15</sup> Other donors have not scaled-up their funding. The UK contributed £61.2 million toward humanitarian, health and nutrition funding to Somalia in the 2021-22 financial year. In comparison, the UK government spent £170m on humanitarian response to the 2016/2017 drought in Somalia to avert the threat of famine and £245 million on combined humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia.<sup>16</sup>

## FUNDING IS NOT FLOWING DIRECTLY TO LOCAL ACTORS

Current aid does not flow directly to local NGOs and other community organizations best placed to respond quickly and cost-effectively. Taking the Somalia HRP for 2022 as an example, 80% of the funded amount was received by UN agencies, 16% by INGOs, less than 2% by National NGOs, and only 0.4% directly by local NGOs (**Figure 2**).<sup>17</sup> Funds directed to international organizations are typically delayed, inflexible and less able to adequately engage local organizations. This means they can end up operating separately from the responses of local organizations, which tend to move faster, more flexibly and better meet local needs.<sup>18</sup> Local actors can also deliver a significantly more cost-effective response: a recent analysis estimates that local intermediaries can deliver programming that is 32% more cost-efficient than international intermediaries.<sup>19</sup>

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11 Mercy Corps (2022). *Outsmarting La niña*.

12 Clayton, M. et al. (2019). *The 2017 pre-farming response in Somalia: progress or reform?* ODI HPG.

13 *Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2023 appeal summary* (accessed 9th May 2023).

14 *Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) appeal data* (accessed 9th May 2023).

15 *Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2023 appeal data* (accessed 9th May 2023).

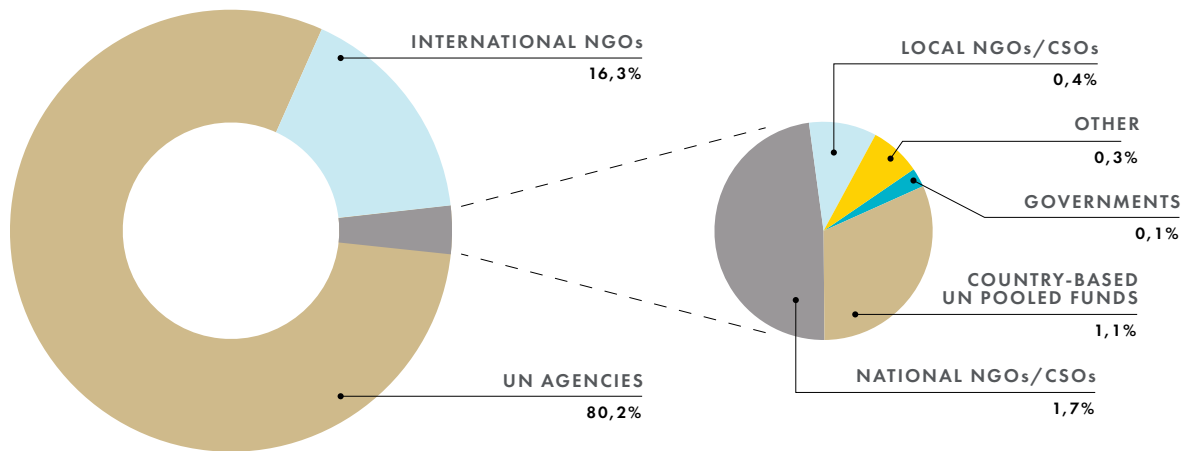
16 DFID (2018). *DFID 2017-2018 Annual Report and Accounts*.

17 *Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2022 breakdown by recipient type* (accessed 26th April 2023).

18 Cabot Venton, C. (2021). *Direct Support to Local Actors: Considerations for Donors*. SPACE; Kim, J. et al. (2022). *Informal social protection networks and resilience in conflict-affected contexts: Lessons from South Sudan and Yemen*. USAID REAL.

19 Cabot Venton, C. et al. (2022). *Passing the Buck: The Economics of Localizing International Assistance*. The Share Trust.

**FIGURE 2:** Funding of the Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2022 by recipient type



In Somalia, where clan-based power structures have long determined how aid resources are distributed, there are concerns that localizing humanitarian response carries a risk of entrenching already existing power hierarchies and inequalities if not carefully managed.<sup>20</sup> However, such risks have been shown to be rooted largely in perceptions rather than evidence or experience.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, research on the humanitarian response to the 2016/2017 drought in Somalia,<sup>22</sup> found that more localized responses based on closer social ties observed the principles of impartiality, participation and accountability, whereas government, international and UN responses suffered from exclusion, diversion and power imbalances.

## THE VAST MAJORITY OF FUNDING IS DIRECTED TOWARDS EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN WAYS THAT DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

The economics of investing in resilience are compelling, in addition to the ethics of such an approach, and should provide donors with the rationale they need to push for a greater share of longer-term assistance aimed at risk reduction. Analysis of different response scenarios in Somalia has shown that investments in building resilience in advance of a crisis or shock are significantly more cost-effective than waiting and providing an emergency humanitarian response.<sup>23</sup> The analysis found that investments in social safety net programming and resilience building (such as investments in markets, health, education, roads and income diversification) in Somalia would have saved US\$794 million over a 15-year period or an average of US\$53 million per year over the cost of a late response.<sup>24</sup> This is a significant cost savings by international donors if they invest in resilience building instead of defaulting to an expensive emergency response.

20 Majid, N. et al. (2022). *Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022*. Feinstein International Center.

21 Barbelet, V. et al. (2021). *Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: A literature study*. ODI HPG.

22 Musa, A.M. (2023). *Somali response to droughts: Social ties and practices of inclusion and exclusion*. DIIS working paper.

23 Cabot Venton, C. (2018). *Economics of Resilience to Drought: Somalia Analysis*. USAID.

24 Ibid.



Furthermore, resilience investments yield significant and tangible benefits, including 1) saving lives and avoiding losses when shocks strike, 2) stimulating economic and development activity by reducing risk and catalyzing innovation, and 3) generating development co-benefits that go beyond coping with shocks (for example strengthened weather and climate services that inform farmers when to plant amid changing rainfall patterns stemming from climate change).<sup>25</sup>

Yet despite this strong evidence, funding to Somalia is overwhelmingly directed to short-term humanitarian and emergency assistance. Approximately 80% of USAID’s total spending to Somalia in 2021 (US\$467 million) was spent on emergency response as compared to 20% on other sectors, including agriculture, education, health, government and civil society.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing on USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funding alone, only 0.6% of funding to Somalia in 2022 was directed to what could be considered resilience interventions (US\$814 million for emergency assistance compared to only US\$5 million for early recovery, risk reduction and resilience interventions).<sup>27</sup> Considering BHA’s commitment, globally and in Somalia,<sup>28</sup> to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations, such a tiny proportion highlights how commitments to resilience are not being met. In the UK, humanitarian funding to East Africa has been cut following cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding from 0.7% to 0.5%. However, within the funding available, humanitarian funding has been prioritized, whereas development funding has experienced multiple rounds of cuts.

Since 2011, there have been steps in the right direction in Somalia. These include investments and progress in early warning information, ‘no-regrets’ approaches that prioritize speed over caution,<sup>29</sup> and flexible financing mechanisms such as crisis modifiers that can be quickly triggered in the case of a humanitarian crisis. Crisis modifiers are built into development programs in areas vulnerable to recurrent shocks and allow humanitarian and development organisations to quickly respond to an anticipated or observed crisis, while continuing to invest in projects that address the root causes of people’s vulnerability. Crisis modifiers are being applied in response to drought and other crises in Somalia<sup>30</sup> and elsewhere to protect development gains already made (see **Box 1**). However, such approaches remain the exception rather than the norm in Somalia.



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25 Tanner, T.M., et al. (2015). *The Triple Dividend of Resilience*. ODI/GFDRR.

26 USAID 2021. *USAID Dollars to Results: Somalia*.

27 USAID 2023. *USAID/BHA Somalia Assistance Overview January 2023*.

28 For example, *USAID/BHA Food Security Activity and Early Recovery, Risk Reduction, and Resilience (ER4)*.

29 Refugees International (2022). *The National Interest: Somalia’s 2022 Famine is Predicted and Preventable*. Op-ed, blog post.

30 For example, see: *SOMJR Crisis Modifier in 2020*; *ACTED Crises Modifier in 2021*; *SomReP Crises Modifier in 2022*.

**BOX 1:** Mercy Corps Resilience in Pastoral Areas, North (RIPA-North) crisis modifier<sup>31</sup>

In Ethiopia, Mercy Corps has activated crisis modifiers through two successive USAID funded programs implemented in pastoralist areas; 1) Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion (PRIME) and 2) Resilience in Pastoral Areas (RIPA).

Between April-October 2022 following the fourth failed rainy season, the RIPA-North program activated a US\$1.5 million crisis-modifier in Somali Region, Ethiopia. The response reached 23,000 households with critical cash assistance; vouchers for animal health, feed, and fodder; income from the sales of livestock; and through essential repairs and maintenance to water points.

The interventions worked through existing relationships with private sector actors to provide a response that complimented and built upon RIPA's market systems development (MSD) approach which focuses on enhancing resilient, sustainable economic opportunities as a pathway to food security.

The crisis modifier helped households to meet their immediate needs, protect assets, livelihoods, and food security, while simultaneously strengthening local markets that households rely on to improve their food security and economic opportunities in future.

Over-reliance on short-term aid to meet immediate needs in response to the current drought leaves Somalia vulnerable to cyclical and predictable shocks ahead. This 'business as usual' approach risks donors being 'tapped out' by pure humanitarian funding, meaning that they will not have a sufficient budget and political will to put towards resilience and recovery.

Further, in providing humanitarian response, there is risk that this will bypass or undermine the resilience capacities that people rely on to cope with and recover from major shocks. This potentially leaves communities more vulnerable, and as the data show above, make it more expensive to respond to future droughts.

Considering drought is a recurring shock in Somalia, response to it must reinforce and strengthen the local systems people rely on (such as social and market systems) with an eye to enhancing their role in buttressing against future emergencies. Donors can do this through multi-year humanitarian and development programs which aim to build resilience, address the underlying causes of crises and build on the initial short-term lifesaving response.



Lindsay Murphy, Mercy Corps

31 Mercy Corps (2022). [Meeting immediate needs and protecting development gains: Lessons from Ethiopia's Drought Response](#).



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Mobilize additional significant, quality and flexible funding for both immediate and longer-term needs.**

According to many criteria, the current drought is more severe than those in 2011/2 and 2016/17, yet timely and comprehensive funding has failed to follow the 2016/17 example that averted famine. There is an urgent need to scale up response efforts and funding to Somalia, and drought-affected areas of the Horn of Africa, to prevent a worsening situation. At the same time, donors need to honor their commitments to investing in resilience. This means dedicating greater resources towards long-term recovery activities to help communities recover in ways that better prepare them to withstand future droughts and other shocks. Smarter, resilience-oriented investments from donors now will avert more costly responses later.

Specifically, we call on donors, governments, and other aid actors to:

- › Fully fund the Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 for Somalia without delay and across all sectors and areas.
- › Scale up emergency cash assistance to households to meet immediate needs and avoid further losses, whilst simultaneously supporting local markets.
- › Invest in the use of crisis modifiers and other flexible financing mechanisms that enable aid agencies to rapidly pivot between development and humanitarian action during crises, and to efficiently leverage existing and ongoing NGO programming as a base for effective response.
- › Ensure funding is flexible, multi-sectoral and multi-year and flows directly to NGOs, including local organizations who are on the ground and best able to respond quickly.
- › Ensure targeting of humanitarian aid goes to marginalized or minority communities and to remote areas by partnering with local actors who can reach areas aid actors cannot, whilst being aware of social inequalities and power hierarchies.

**2 We know what matters for resilience in Somalia, but are not doing enough to strengthen those critical capacities**



**FIGURE 3:** Evidence-based sources of resilience in Somalia

Somali households and communities consistently draw on a number of ‘resilience capacities’ to cope with the multiple and compounded shocks and stresses they experience, including drought, conflict and insecurity, flooding, and crop and livestock disease. Some of the key sources of resilience in Somalia are well accepted by aid actors, such as livelihood and income diversification,<sup>32</sup> access to credit and loans, and availability of basic services.<sup>33</sup> Others are less tangible and poorly understood but often even more important, including social connections, informal social safety nets, and psychosocial factors.

Evidence collected during the current drought shows that a number of these resilience capacities were being utilized by households as positive coping strategies (**Figure 3**).<sup>34</sup> These include taking up casual labor, accessing loans and credit, turning to social connections, including the diaspora, for support, and migrating to towns to access support from their social networks and basic services.

How do we know these resilience capacities matter? Qualitative and quantitative evidence found that households who were able to access and use these sources of resilience stood a better chance of withstanding the impacts of the first two failed rainy seasons without resorting to distressful coping strategies.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, they exhibited higher levels of food security for longer into the drought relative to similar households.

32 Lwanga-Ntale, C., and Owino, B.O. (2020). *Understanding vulnerability and resilience in Somalia*. *Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*.

33 Mercy Corps (2013). *What really matters for resilience? Exploratory evidence on the determinants of resilience to food security shocks in Southern Somalia*.

34 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

35 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

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*I give help to people who are more vulnerable than me.  
If someone comes to my home in search of food I welcome  
and treat him as a brother, and we eat together.*

—Interview with male pastoralist, Madaxwarbe, July 2022

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Social connections help households access what they need to survive during droughts and other crises. Households provide one another a range of support, from the tangible to the intangible, including cash, food, information, labor and emotional support. Social connections are a long-established source of resilience in Somalia, and households rely on their social networks across all types of shock. Many studies highlight the strong and positive link between households' social connections and their ability to access food and assets during crises.<sup>36</sup>

Somalis' social networks are playing a crucial role during the current drought.<sup>37</sup> The more connected a household is, the easier it is for them to access support from their social networks. In particular, people rely on their connections in urban centers and in the larger diaspora for remittances and information. Urban to rural connections and flow of resources are vital risk-sharing mechanisms that enable rural people to access what they need to survive. Those with more social connections use their networks to share and secure support for the more vulnerable and less-connected households in their communities. However, given the protracted nature of the crisis, these mechanisms are becoming depleted as households' capacity to share has declined.

Social connectedness combined with the effective use of remittances enabled communities to cope with the previous 2011 and 2016/2017 droughts in Somalia.<sup>38</sup> During the 2011 famine, the extent of people's social network, and the ability of networks to mobilize resources were shown to be key factors that determined whether and how well people survived.<sup>39</sup> Social groups most dependent on the rural economy with few connections to relatives and clan-members outside of these areas were the most vulnerable. Whereas, households that could rely upon connections in the diaspora were more likely to survive the famine, regardless of the short-term impacts on their livelihoods.

Although the strength of networks is a major factor that allows people to be more resilient, social and clan identity strongly shapes how communities support each other in times of crises.<sup>40</sup> Marginalized or minority clan affiliated households tend to have more limited capacity to draw on their social networks and face increased exposure to shocks.<sup>41</sup> These more marginalized and vulnerable groups<sup>42</sup> have fewer connections in the diaspora, less access to remittances and tend to be underserved by humanitarian actors.<sup>43</sup> Such dynamics can ultimately magnify risk and vulnerability and need if not mitigated or addressed.

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36 Lwanga-Ntale, C., and Owino, B.O. (2020). *Understanding vulnerability and resilience in Somalia*. *Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*; Maxwell, D. et al. (2016). *Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011*. *Food Policy*.

37 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

38 Lwanga-Ntale, C., and Owino, B.O. (2020). *Understanding vulnerability and resilience in Somalia*. *Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*; Maxwell, D. et al. (2016). *Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011*. *Food Policy*.

39 Maxwell, D. et al. (2016). *Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011*. *Food Policy*.

40 Ibid.

41 OCHA (2023). *Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*; Majid, N. et al. (2022). *Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022*. Feinstein International Center.

42 These groups include the Rahanweyn and the Bantu/Jarar, who were hardest hit by the famine in 2011. These groups comprise more sedentary farmers and agropastoralists as well as those depending on agricultural labor in riverine and inter-riverine areas (Majid, N. et al. (2022). *Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022*. Feinstein International Center; Maxwell, D. et al. (2016). *Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011*. *Food Policy*.

43 Majid, N. et al. (2022). *Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022*. Feinstein International Center.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

Social support networks are also an important source of psychosocial resilience that help to reduce anxiety, trauma and mental suffering. In addition, psychosocial factors such as optimism, self-efficacy, future-oriented thinking, and seeking comfort in religion and spirituality, helped households cope with the current drought.<sup>44</sup> Community and religious leaders were found to be key sources of such emotional support. They often organize their own informal support networks to mobilize resources to meet their community's material needs. Both of these support functions can improve households' ability to cope, making local leaders vital partners in aid actors' response efforts.

## ACCESS TO CREDIT AND LOANS, AND BUSINESS LINKAGES

Access to credit and loans, such as through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), self help groups, and other local savings groups, have been found to be pivotal to the ability of Somalis to survive during crises. Savings groups can provide households with financial resources to adapt and diversify their livelihoods, set up small businesses, and adopt drought mitigation measures as shocks arise.

In 2022, participation in VSLAs helped Somali women and men access loans to start small businesses, such as small market shops, that they could depend on for income after losing their livestock.<sup>45</sup> Households who had established small businesses perceived themselves as more resilient compared to others in their communities. Small businesses were particularly important sources of income among women and IDPs, who used their social connections to businesses and wholesalers in towns to access goods on credit, which they then repaid using the profits from their businesses or cash assistance. As a result of these and other benefits, participation in a savings group has been found to be consistently linked to better food security and wellbeing outcomes.<sup>46</sup> Involving more vulnerable community members in self-help groups is a promising approach to build their social connectedness, financial resources, and resilience over time.

During 2022, access to credit and borrowing from local businesses was critical for households to acquire food and other basic necessities to cope with the drought.<sup>47</sup> Social connectedness was an important component of households' ability to access credit from local businesses, as individuals that were well-known in their community were more likely to receive credit than those who were not. Households often used external assistance provided by cash-transfers to repay these debts to maintain social capital and establish creditworthiness among local businesses and ensure future access to credit. In fact, households that received external assistance found it easier to access credit from local business owners. This presents an opportunity for well-timed cash assistance to reinforce local markets through intentional support to local vendors and businesses.

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***Borrowing is what we live for. We are full of debts. Especially during the current drought, people mainly consume what they have borrowed. It is a hard time for people to survive without borrowing.***

—Female focus group participant, Hanano IDP camp, July 2022

44 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

45 Ibid.

46 SomReP (2018). *Positive Deviance in Somalia: Why are some households more resilient than others?*; Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

47 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

Self help and similar groups also extend psychosocial support and information that helps strengthen confidence and self-esteem.<sup>48</sup> Group participation builds participants' social capital, self-esteem and empowerment, and provides a platform for exchanging ideas, and relieving psychological stress. Such groups, including VSLAs, can suffer and disband however during large shocks, breaking down these support mechanisms and ability to save.<sup>49</sup> There has been some evidence of this during the current drought. Well-designed and targeted humanitarian responses can reinforce the capacity of self help groups to continue functioning and provide benefits to their members during such crises.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME DIVERSIFICATION

Another key source of resilience in Somalia is the capacity to adapt and diversify one's livelihood. In 2022, having multiple sources of income, such as by taking up casual labor opportunities in towns, was a determining factor in the ability to generate income and helped households meet some needs and access basic necessities.<sup>50</sup> In IDP camps, casual labor was often the only source of income available. These additional sources of income are particularly helpful during early phases of drought, but then become increasingly constrained as it worsens. Those that engaged in more skilled labor activities, such as teaching, tailoring, and construction, fared better when it came to coping. These livelihood activities were less vulnerable to climate shocks, were in higher demand, and provided higher wages. Other recent evidence from Somalia suggests that engagement in casual labor can be a pathway to setting up small businesses.<sup>51</sup>

Diversifying income sources can play a critical role in protecting against shocks and stresses, especially to those whose primary livelihood activity is climate vulnerable and sensitive to climate shocks. However, having multiple income sources itself is not strongly linked with resilience to food security shocks—rather, independent sources that spread risk across different types of hazards are more important. As found in Somalia<sup>52</sup> and elsewhere in the Horn<sup>53</sup> diversifying income sources is only likely to contribute to resilience if multiple livelihood strategies are not affected by the same types of shocks, for example by diversifying to non-farm income sources.

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***During the second failed rainy season, some people started looking for daily unskilled work...and sure enough they are the households that have been able to cope with drought most thanks to various sources of income. Through the little they earned from this daily work, they made it through that failed season.***

—Key informant interview with community leader, Dondardir IDP camp, July 2022

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48 Ibid.

49 SomReP (2018). *Positive Deviance in Somalia: Why are some households more resilient than others?*

50 Research carried out through the Somalia Resilience Population Measurement (RPM) Activity, 2022.

51 BRCiS (2021). *Resilience building through income generating activities.*

52 Mercy Corps (2013). *What really matters for resilience? Exploratory evidence on the determinants of resilience to food security shocks in Southern Somalia.*

53 Nelson, S. et al. (2016). *The effect of livelihood diversity on recovery and shock impact in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.* ILRI/TANGO.

Functioning market systems are key to enabling crisis-affected populations to adapt and diversify their livelihoods, and meet their basic needs during emergencies. Markets facilitate information sharing, social connections, financial transactions, trade in goods and services that help people secure new income sources. During crises, communities depend heavily on markets, and local business and traders are among the quickest to adapt and help vulnerable households cope in the short term and recover in the longer-term. Recent experience from the use of a crisis modifier in Somali Region, Ethiopia (**see Box 1**) shows how providing support to and through market actors and businesses, including livestock traders, financial service providers and private veterinary pharmacies, helped households manage the current drought, prevent the use of negative coping strategies and maintain their household food supply.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Program in ways that strengthen critical sources of resilience in Somalia**

Multiple studies have identified crucial entry points for aid actors to leverage and strengthen key sources of resilience—both in response to the current drought, and to proactively reduce risks to future crises in Somalia. Aid actors now need to prioritize resilience-focused responses which work through and strengthen existing social and market systems. Directly-targeted assistance, such as food and cash, while critical to the crisis responses, cannot meet the current and future needs of Somalia. Donors can achieve greater scale and coverage by also investing in the systems that help communities cope with, and recover from, crises.

To strengthen social systems, aid actors should:

- › Partner and work with local community actors who are deeply embedded in their communities and pre-positioned to reach vulnerable households.
- › Work through informal support networks, such as self help groups, that have potential to enhance social connectedness and bolster psychosocial resilience.
- › Use informal social networks to communicate and disseminate timely and accurate information on humanitarian conditions and the design and implementation of activities.

To enhance the functioning of market systems, aid actors should:

- › Robustly fund long-term economic interventions as part of drought response and recovery to support households to adapt and diversify their livelihoods. Such investments should address systems-level challenges related to access to markets, including financial services, of marginalized and displaced populations.
- › Support local traders, vendors, and financial service providers with grants and/or capacity strengthening to ensure availability of key goods and services at affordable prices. Such financial and technical support can be a critical lifeline to help local businesses survive current and future economic shocks.
- › Invest in self help and similar groups to improve vulnerable community members' social capital and financial independence over time.





Ezra Millstein, Mercy Corps

### 3 Aid has largely ignored the underlying drivers of crises in Somalia

## CLIMATE CHANGE

The prolonged drought caused by below average rainfall over five successive rainy seasons is a major factor in the current humanitarian crisis. Somalia, like other arid and semi-arid lands, is highly vulnerable to droughts and floods which are becoming increasingly frequent and extreme due to climate change. A recent study by a group of climate scientists shows that human-induced climate change has made the current drought 100 times more likely in the Horn of Africa.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in a 1.2°C cooler world the low rainfall and high evaporation of water conditions experienced, would not have led to drought.<sup>55</sup>

Although pastoralists and farmers in Somalia have always experienced drought and climate variability, these are becoming more common and intense in severity as the climate warms. Heavy rainfall conditions and extremes are also more likely, as illustrated by recent flash floods in some areas.<sup>56</sup> These trends indicate the urgent need for investments in climate adaptation to both droughts and floods. However, as is typical in fragile and conflict-affected countries, investment in climate adaptation in Somalia is lagging behind and there is weak knowledge and capacity to respond to climate change at national and local levels.<sup>57</sup>

## CONFLICT

The current humanitarian crisis in Somalia is also driven by conflict, poor governance and inequality. Conflicts due to inter-clan dispute, political and electoral violence, and Al-Shabaab attacks continue to cause insecurity and instability across Somalia. Inter-clan conflict is closely linked with climate as disputes over resources are intensified by climate shocks that reduce available water and pasture.<sup>58</sup> The current drought has heightened existing tensions in Bay and other regions, and has been linked to a sharp increase in political violence in the country.<sup>59</sup> Conflict is thus exacerbated by the effects of climate change, which compounds existing sources of economic, political, and social risks that drive violence.<sup>60</sup>

54 World Weather Attribution (2023). [Human-induced climate change increased drought severity in Horn of Africa.](#)

55 Ibid.

56 OCHA (2023). [Somali: Gu rainy season 2023 Flash Floods Update No. 3 \(13 April 2023\).](#)

57 Cao, Y. et al. (2021). [Exploring the conflict blind spots in climate adaptation finance.](#) SPARC synthesis report.

58 ACAPS (2023). [Somalia Impact of drought: Bandir and Bay regions.](#) Thematic report.

59 ACLED (2023). [Context Assessment: Heightened Political Violence in Somalia.](#)

60 Mercy Corps (2021). [Addressing the Climate-Conflict Nexus.](#)

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*When drought hit these areas community relations were already not good...for example, drought and conflict are factors that have pushed pastoralists to drop out of the agro-pastoral livelihood system. Conflict in the area is caused by a combination of diminishing grazing areas and population growth (both human and animal), contributing to land degradation, competition for pasture and water, and inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict.*

—Interview with pastoralist, Tuboy, July 2022

Marginalization and inequality are major contributors to conflict in Somalia, as minority clans and ethnic groups experience exclusion and discrimination.<sup>61</sup> In particular, minority agro-pastoral populations in the Bay and Bakool regions and the riverine farmers along the Juba and Shebelle rivers have traditionally faced marginalization, leading to these communities facing persistently high levels of acute malnutrition and potential famine, as they did in 1992 and 2011.<sup>62</sup> These groups also remain the most vulnerable and under-accessed by humanitarian actors.<sup>63</sup>

The environment has been a major casualty of the combined effects of climate change and conflict in Somalia. In many regions of the country, soil, water, and pasture have been degraded to levels that can no longer sustain agricultural and pastoral livelihoods. This has led to increased food insecurity, displacement as poor rural households migrate to towns in search of income-earning opportunities and humanitarian support,<sup>64</sup> and conflict over the dwindling natural resource base.<sup>65</sup>

Taken together, these underlying drivers of crises undermine resilience to future crises and cause the chronic vulnerability evident in Somalia. Aid actors, by and large, have ignored these underlying drivers of fragility, thereby inadvertently perpetuating Somalia's chronic humanitarian need.

## ADDRESSING UNDERLYING DRIVERS IN COMPLEX CRISES

Designing aid investments to address the 'root causes' of climate change, poor governance, and environmental degradation is a tall order even in more stable contexts. For Somalia, the wisest course may be to work on the near-term sources of instability and climate vulnerability in ways that create the conditions for longer-term peacebuilding and development efforts to take hold.<sup>66</sup> In particular, investing in social cohesion and anticipatory action to climate-related shocks are promising entry points for the Somalia context.

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61 OCHA (2023). *Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*.

62 Ibid.

63 Majid, N. et al. (2022). *Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022*. Feinstein International Center.

64 OCHA (2023). *Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*.

65 BRCIS (2023). *BRCIS Position Paper: Charting a path to drought resilience in Somalia*.

66 Mercy Corps (2020). *Towards resilience: Advancing collective impact in protracted crises*.

There is growing evidence that increasing interaction, trust, and other aspects of social cohesion between conflicting groups can improve security and reduce support for armed opposition groups.<sup>67</sup> The most impactful approaches pair efforts to improve state-society relations with interventions to strengthen intercommunal relations. For instance, in Northeast Nigeria, joint community development projects combined with training of local leaders in dispute resolution increased trust and reduced conflict between farmers and herders, despite increased insecurity in the broader region.<sup>68</sup> In Somalia, a youth education and civic engagement program fostered engagement between youth and local authorities, which improved participants' perceptions of state actors and institutions, and reduced their support for political violence.<sup>69</sup> Research increasingly points to the roles of community participation and effective, legitimate local governance as critical to both resilience and security.<sup>70</sup> The Ward Development Planning approach being scaled in Northern Kenya shows strong potential as a participatory planning model to address climate and conflict risk.<sup>71</sup>

To reduce climate vulnerability in fragile contexts, anticipatory action is receiving increasing attention and investments. Anticipatory action relies on early warning systems, for instance for droughts or floods, to trigger provision of assistance ahead of a pending shock, to reduce or prevent humanitarian impacts. Initial evidence points to the effectiveness of anticipatory action, largely in the form of cash transfers, in protecting food and livelihood security.<sup>72</sup> However, the current drought crisis in Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa show clearly that the potential of anticipatory action is not being used to reduce humanitarian need. A primary reason is that early warning is not resulting in early action, despite major improvements in drought monitoring and management systems.<sup>73</sup> In Somalia, limited economic opportunities curtail the ability of Somalis to take proactive steps to protect livelihoods and assets when crises are forecast.<sup>74</sup> This limits the potential of anticipatory action and highlights the need for greater investment in longer term adaptation and resilience. The current crisis has affected Somalis in different places, at different times and in different ways, meaning that there can be no single funding mechanism or common trigger to best organize and manage anticipatory action, particularly in the context of 'wicked crises' such as this one.<sup>75</sup>



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67 Mercy Corps (2022). [Strengthening social cohesion for violence prevention](#).

68 Mercy Corps (2022). [Can mediation reduce violence?](#)

69 Mercy Corps (2018). [If youth are given the chance](#).

70 Sipri (2022). [Local participation: The missing link for climate resilience and conflict resolution?](#) WritePeace blog.

71 Mercy Corps (2023). [Local Participation Amidst Climate Shocks](#).

72 Anticipation Hub (2023). [Evidence database](#).

73 Farr, E. et al. (2022). [Dangerous delay 2: The cost of inaction](#). Save the Children / Oxfam.

74 Levine, L. et al. (2023). [Anticipatory Action in advance of 'wicked crises'](#). SPARC report.

75 Ibid.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Address key drivers of climate vulnerability and conflict as part of, and in addition to, humanitarian responses**

Drought alone does not create famine. In Somalia and elsewhere, famine has largely been the result of the confluence of conflict, poor governance, and climate disasters. Aid must be used to address these underlying drivers of crises in Somalia, by investing in climate change adaptation and advancing peace. Addressing climate, conflict, and the resulting humanitarian needs together presents a unique opportunity to interrupt the negative cycle of crises, and safeguard climate adaptation and peace outcomes against future risk.

Specifically, donors, governments, and other aid actors should:

- › Commit to early anticipatory action and preparedness in advance of crises. Secure funding to be readily dispatched ahead of climate and other shocks, and create the political will needed to ensure early warning leads to early action.
- › Increase investments in, and integration of, peacebuilding, good governance, and social cohesion efforts into all drought response. Ensure peacebuilding expertise is included in the design and delivery of humanitarian and development assistance in conflict-driven crises.
- › Treat climate change and conflict as overlapping crises and address them together. Design and fund programs that strengthen diverse and climate-smart livelihoods, management of shared natural resources and the environment, and local capacities to anticipate and respond to both climate and conflict risks.
- › Ensure that anticipatory action interventions can deliver contextualized support ahead of future shocks. Work through existing, long-term resilience programming as a promising way to deliver this contextualized assistance.

### **Suggested citation**

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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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