

# Gender Alert on Drought in Ethiopia



May 4, 2022

## ISSUE I: THE IMPACT OF THE DROUGHT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN ETHIOPIA

### KEY FINDINGS

- 8+ million people in Oromia, Somali, SNNP and Southwest regions are in need of assistance;
- Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the drought in Ethiopia, yet rarely mentioned in briefings, response plans, analyses and reports;
- More evidence and data are needed on the impact of drought on women and girls in Ethiopia.

The purpose of this gender alert is to highlight the gender-specific impacts of the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia. The alert focuses on the challenges women and girls face as a result of the ongoing drought emergency in the Horn of Africa. It demonstrates how women and girls in Ethiopia are particularly affected by the drought and aims to raise awareness with all stakeholders about the gender differentiated impacts, and the need for more gender sensitive responses. It also includes a gender-risk assessment that assesses possible developments related to the humanitarian and security risks faced by women and girls in Ethiopia and concludes with a set of recommendations.

The current drought response in Ethiopia is being scaled up across sectors, including food security, nutrition assistance, provision of safe water and sanitation, and livelihood protection. In addition, other urgent humanitarian assistance to drought-stricken areas such as agriculture and livestock support for pastoralist communities are also being increased. Nonetheless, the needs of women and

girls may not be met due to a number of compounding factors such as the breakdown of key services which are critical to the health, protection, and recovery of women and girls; weakened informal and formal protection and accountability mechanisms; disrupted livelihoods, increased displacement, power imbalances, and limited access to resources.

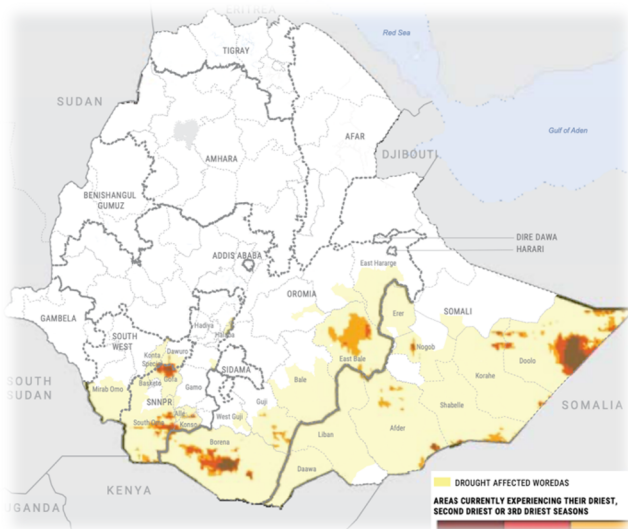
Hence, a more gender-sensitive approach is necessary to ensure that the needs of women and girls in drought-affected communities are met. To this effect, UN Women Ethiopia is actively working with existing national, regional and community-based coordination mechanisms, including the various Inter-Cluster Coordination Working Groups, the Ethiopia Inter-Agency PSEA Network, Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations, CSOs and NGOs to respond to the drought emergency.

### BACKGROUND

Thus far, an estimated 15 million people have been severely affected by the drought in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia in 2022<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/15-million-people-face-humanitarian-crisis-due-drought-horn-africa>

In Ethiopia, the current drought caused by a delayed onset of rain has especially impacted the livelihoods of pastoral and agropastoral farmers in the southern and southeastern parts of Ethiopia and displaced 4.2 million people across the country<sup>2</sup>. Most notably, Doolo (Somali Region), East Bale, Borena (Oromia Region), and South Omo and Gofa (SNNP Region) have reportedly experienced their driest, second-driest or third-driest rainy season since 1981<sup>3</sup>.



Overview of drought affected areas in Ethiopia 2022<sup>4</sup>

Overall, at least 8 million people in Oromia, Somali, SNNP and Southwest regions are affected and in need of assistance. Estimates from regional governments indicate that more than 1.46 million livestock have died due to a lack of pasture and water. This constitutes a 67, 31, and 7 percent increase in livestock deaths in the Somali, Oromia, Southwest and SNNP regions, respectively, compared to the 170,000+ livestock deaths in the same regions recorded in January 2022<sup>5</sup>. According to FAO, an additional 10 million livestock are at risk across affected areas. Water is at critically low levels, also leading to increased risks of water-borne diseases<sup>6</sup>. This situation has severely amplified food insecurity and malnutrition issues in the affected regions.

For example, more than three million people are facing

water shortages in the Somali region, and an estimated 3.6+ million are facing food-shortages<sup>7</sup>. Coupled with water shortage for human consumption, the need for water trucking is pushing the water prices higher<sup>8</sup>. Cases of water-borne diseases such as cholera will also escalate as people will instead rely on unsafe water sources. Similarly, livestock-wildlife concentration around available water sources will increase competition, risks of conflict and possible disease transmission<sup>9</sup>.

This situation is worsened by an observed reduction in purchasing power due to falling livestock prices (impacted by poor body conditions, diseases etc.) and decreased milk production against increasing prices of food items<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, fuel shortages have resulted in a limited capacity for food and aid delivery trucks to get around<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the below-average October-December 2021 rains followed by the below-average February-May 2022 rains have resulted in below-average February-May 2022 production. Pasture and water depletion are expected to continue through 2022 as it will be the fourth consecutive poor season for south and southeastern pastoral areas<sup>12</sup>. As a result, there are expectations that there will be a continued and complete exhaustion of milk production (the main source of nutrition for children) and increased livestock death in the south and southeastern pastoral areas.

Furthermore, at least 2.9 million people require water trucking services in Somali and Oromia alone. The education of over 514,018 children has also been impacted. These children are estimated to have missed at least 4 months of their academic year, which almost accounts for half a term's learning<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, more than 286,000 people who are able to travel have migrated in search of pasture or assistance and water, leaving behind the elderly and the sick, increasing their even more vulnerability further<sup>14</sup>.

## THE IMPACTS OF THE DROUGHT

<sup>2</sup> Input from UN Women Ethiopia's Women Economic Empowerment Unit

<sup>3</sup> <https://unocha.exposure.co/in-my-70-years-i-have-not-seen-anything-as-severe-as-this>

<sup>4</sup> FAO Ethiopia Drought Assessment Report for Oromia SNNPR and Somali Regions, December 2021

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ethiopia\\_drought\\_update\\_11\\_april\\_2022a\\_v3.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ethiopia_drought_update_11_april_2022a_v3.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-drought-update-no4-april-2022>

<sup>7</sup> RECC Presentation, organised by Network of Ethiopia Women's Associations, March 25, 2022

<sup>8</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000136035/download/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> FAO Ethiopia - Rapid Drought Assessment Report (Borena and Dawa Zones), November 2021

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team Key Messages, April 2022

<sup>13</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-drought-update-no4-april-2022>

<sup>14</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-drought-update-no-3-april-2022>

Recent inter-sector and Inter-Agency assessments show that drought is having a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of affected communities in Ethiopia, forcing families into adopting negative survival strategies, including child labour, survival sex, and trafficking. These have resulted in an increase in psychosocial distress of children and caregivers, family separation, and risks of sexual violence, domestic conflicts, and forced/early marriage.

### Increased responsibilities, access to education

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters, with global studies showing they are 14 times more likely than males to die during disasters<sup>15</sup>. This trend is mirrored in Ethiopia, where a high rate of school dropout among girls has been observed<sup>16</sup>. Particularly, as men and adolescent boys and girls migrate to urban centres looking for jobs, a higher proportion of girls are required to support the increased burden of household chores by dropping out of school.



Dried out riverbed, Somali region, Ethiopia, photo: UNW/A. Poignant

This is partly due to their increased involvement in domestic responsibilities that include walking long distances to fetch water, caring for younger siblings at home, and trying to generate income, and partly because of lack of school feeding, WASH facilities, and family movements<sup>17</sup>. Although some women and girls have also engaged in petty trade as a coping mechanism, they are generally unable to sustain their

business due to increased household responsibilities, further weakening their socio-economic situation.

### Livestock mortality and disease increasing women's and girl's burden of labour

Above-average levels of livestock disease and mortality caused by the drought is also increasing the labour burden for women and girls. Normally, women use donkeys to carry water, however due to the poor condition of donkeys, some women are walking longer-than-normal distances to carry water on their backs. In some areas, students had dropped out of school to support their families in taking care of the substantial number of animals that remained at homesteads because they were too weak to migrate. For example, in the Dawa and Borena Zones (Somali Region and Oromia) women were reportedly responsible for feeding and searching for feed for calves and a few other animals left at home<sup>18</sup>.



Livestock diseased due to drought conditions<sup>19</sup>

### Heightened risks for gender-based violence

Where the drought has forced women to travel further in search of food and water, they have been observed to be at greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including survival sex and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). The risks of early marriage for girls as a coping mechanism (through payment of a bride price and reducing number of dependents per household), as well as possible rise in domestic violence due to diminishing household resources and income is also notable<sup>18,20</sup>. These findings are strengthened by additional evidence indicating a strong association between drought and

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/PB3-AP-Gender-and-disaster-risk-reduction.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-humanitarian-key-messages-25-april-2022>

<sup>17</sup> OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia, April 2022

<sup>18</sup> FAO Ethiopia - Rapid Drought Assessment Report (Borena and Dawa Zones) - November 2021

<sup>19</sup> <https://unocha.exposure.co/in-my-70-years-i-have-not-seen-anything-as-severe-as-this>

<sup>20</sup> Input from ICCG Ethiopia Protection Cluster

Intimate Partner Violence among adolescent girls and unemployed women across sub-Saharan Africa<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, according to the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) report, nearly one-quarter (23 per cent) of women have at some point in their lives experienced physical violence with a total of 10 percent having reported to have experienced sexual violence<sup>22</sup>. These conditions are expected to be worsened by the drought emergency. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains grossly underreported in Ethiopia due to insufficient access to rights and knowledge of reporting mechanisms among women and girls, and the severe social stigma associated with it.

### Displacement and conflict as compounding factors

Beyond these risks, the displacement of over 285,000 people between October 2021 and March 2022 as a result of the drought in Ethiopia has further exacerbated the threat of violence against women and girls. With growing scarcity and competition for rangeland resources creating further putting pressure on communities living in areas characterized by a high presence of protracted IDPs, resource-based conflicts have reduced humanitarian access and pushed women and girls into shelters, camps or temporary settlements where physical security, and safe and accessible infrastructure and services are lacking<sup>23</sup>.

### Poor access, lack of information and increased health risks

Additionally, communities, including female-headed household, who live some distance from distribution centres often lack reliable information about distribution of humanitarian assistance and livelihood opportunities. This also includes access to health, legal, psychosocial, and available reporting services for SGBV related issues. Lack of access to appropriate water and sanitation services, including access to menstrual hygiene materials have also been observed. This, in combination with malnutrition and lack of access to food poses an especially heightened risks for children and pregnant or lactating women,

as their needs tend to be greater<sup>24</sup>.

### Diminished socio-economic agency

The drought affected lowland areas including the southern and eastern Oromia and Somali region are highly male-dominated societies and participation of women in decision-making both at household and community levels is very low. This exposes women to additional vulnerabilities as they have very limited voice, if at all, on money-handling, community issues, freedom of movement, and opportunities to engage in income-generating activities. These issues are also expressed in terms of prioritizing paying for boys' school fees, and marrying off adolescent girls to gain money that for food and other necessities<sup>25</sup>.

### Lack of data and evidence to support interventions

This gender alert has consulted over 30 sources of information, including rapid drought assessments, reports from a variety of humanitarian and development actors, news sources, and more. A limited focus and lack of gender- and gender disaggregated data was observed across all of these. Such as gaps make it difficult to monitor progress for women and girls. Unless gender is prioritized in data collection, gender data scarcity and gaps will persist and making sure that data represent the lived reality of women and girls by addressing deep-seated biases in concepts, definitions, classifications, and methodologies, is essential to addressing the gendered risks associated with drought.

Without such efforts, gender related issues and risks will likely remain under-prioritized and reported on in future drought responses in Ethiopia. This could have lasting effects on the efficiency of drought responses in Ethiopia with the potential to further undermine progress on women's livelihoods, rights, and gender equality. This is especially considering the interlinkages between fragility and gender inequalities<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, it is vital to increase the focus on gendered issues associated with the drought emergency to ensure that the needs of women and girls are met.

## OVERVIEW OF GENDER RISKS

This section provides an overview of the potential impact that situations that took place during the reporting period (January - April 2022) may have on security and livelihoods in the next two months. Hence, this section

<sup>21</sup> UNDP 2016: Gender and Climate Change

<sup>22</sup> <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR328/FR328.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in the context of Climate Change, CSW66, UN Women, IUCN. 2022

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/press-releases/prolonged-drought-pushing-families-ethiopia-brink>

<sup>25</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-humanitarian-key-messages-25-april-2022>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-equality-across-the-hdp-nexus-july2021.pdf>

draws on the above, as well as inputs from clusters and humanitarian and development partners as well as UN Women Ethiopia Teams to estimate likely future developments or status related to humanitarian/security and risks faced by women and girls in Ethiopia. **Table 1** explains the different risk levels; the likelihood of a certain development taking place, or a certain situation persisting (for example, the likelihood of continued drought impact).

**Table 1 – Risk levels**

TERMINOLOGY	DESCRIPTION
<b>SEVERE</b>	The likelihood of incidents/events is <b>almost certain</b>
<b>SUBSTANTIAL</b>	The likelihood of incidents/events is <b>probable</b>
<b>MODERATE</b>	The likelihood of incidents/events is <b>about even</b>
<b>LOW</b>	The likelihood of incidents/events is <b>improbable</b>

**Table 2 – consolidated risk levels by location**

	Continued impact from drought	Lack of sufficient food and NFIs	No safe shelter is available
Somali Region	<b>SEVERE</b>	<b>SEVERE</b>	SUBSTANTIAL
Oromia	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL
SNNP	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL
South West	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL	SUBSTANTIAL

**Table 2** provides an outline of the estimated risks in the regions that have been identified as most severely affected by the drought. While a total of 20 risks were assessed Table 2 only displays the top three. The estimations point to risks specifically facing women and girls.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate gender into every stage of drought risk management planning and implementation processes to ensure that all parts of society inform an efficient and adapted drought preparedness and response;
- Provide support to existing community-based coordination mechanisms to strengthen natural resource conflict management. These interventions should be gender-sensitive, include strengthening regular information sharing and combatting misinformation, sustained engagement between existing natural resource management committees, work to increase women's participation in community based natural resource management committees including in their leadership and accurate monitoring of displacement patterns;
- Increase investment into static services and mobile teams to provide lifesaving GBV and child protection prevention and response services, as well as improved GBV risk mitigation across all humanitarian sectors;
- Include monitoring of the situation of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including SGBV, SEA, and early marriage practices in all drought response programmes processes to reduce the risk of violence and other protection concerns;
- Prioritize awareness raising and capacity building efforts on SGBV, VAWG, and SEA prevention efforts related to environment, climate action and disaster risk reduction sectors;
- Prioritize funding for prevention, mitigation, and response to GBV as well as other protection needs during disasters and humanitarian crisis – these are life-saving measures;
- Make assessments and surveys gender-responsive (key to ensuring collection of sex- and gender-disaggregated data). This is especially important to increase evidence, knowledge, and understanding of the impact of climate change on women and girls in Ethiopia. A first step towards this is to develop indicators which specifically measure the risks and ensuring gender analyses in humanitarian updates.

## NEXT ISSUE AND CONTACT DETAILS

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- The next issue of the Ethiopia Gender Alert will be published in July;
- The theme of the next Ethiopia Gender Alert will be the **“Unmet Needs of Displaced Women and Girls in Ethiopia”**
- For any inquiries or to make a contribution, please contact: [wpsa.ethiopia@unwomen.org](mailto:wpsa.ethiopia@unwomen.org)