

Out of the frying pan into the fire

Analysis of the hunger crisis in Kenya



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aid

74-year-old Habiba Ali Dido pictured in her shop in Watiti, Moyale (1). Credit Katie Cox_Christian Aid.

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List of acronyms

WHO	World Health Organisation
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
FAO	The Food and Agricultural Organisation
FWP	Fair World Project
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
WFP	World Food Programme
MAM	March April May (Long Rains)
OND	October November December (Short Rains)
ASAL	Arid and semi-arid lands (North and Northeastern Kenya)
DEC	Disaster Emergency Committee
L&D	Loss and Damage
GoK	Government of Kenya
PACIDA	Pastoralist Community Initiative Development and Assistance
CIFA	Community Initiative Facilitation and Assistance

Executive summary

Over the past few years, we have seen progress on tackling hunger evaporate. Reports show that over 122 million more people were food insecure in 2022 than in 2019¹ and there are further estimates that until 2027 severe food insecurity will likely affect over 240 million people.

Multiple and intersecting drivers intensify hunger and food insecurity. Conflict and climate are the biggest drivers of food insecurity; the COVID-19 pandemic caused hunger to become more widespread, especially across parts of Africa, Latin America and South Asia. We have seen the hunger crisis most acute across Africa where flooding in West Africa and Southern Africa in 2022 swept away crops sparking a hunger crisis, and since 2020, the prolonged and persistent La Niña weather phenomenon caused five consecutive failed rainy seasons across the Horn of Africa - the worst drought in 40 years. The extent and the severity of the most recent drought has been immense, 36.1 million people were affected, and 13 million livestock died across the region – which translates to the loss of over 120 million litres of milk.²

The impacts of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have triggered increases in global food and energy prices – driving inflation, and subsequently the cost-of-living crisis. These economic shocks have widened inequality and have undermined ‘resilience and capacity to respond to food shocks’³

With the return of El Niño after three successive years of La Niña, hunger is predicted to persist – as El Niño comes with increased likelihoods of droughts and risks to global production of staple crops⁴. Christian Aid’s experiences of working with local partners has revealed that that people’s ability to withstand crisis shocks can be strengthened, through approaches that improve preparedness, reduce humanitarian need and uses agroecological practices.

Overview of this brief

Building on from our ‘Ripping off the Band Aid’ report, we will look in this brief on where we are now. Following the multi-year failed rains across the Horn of Africa, this brief examines Kenya, and what food security outcomes look like in the face of the drought coming to an end and the onset of heavy rains due to El Niño. Kenya is facing multiple and intersecting drivers such as climate change and debt, without structural changes and investment in anticipatory responses and adaptation, these

drivers will continue to hamper the resilience of vulnerable communities.

In this brief and building on our analysis in Ripping off the Band Aid, we explore and drawn upon learnings from survivor and community led approaches to the crisis provided recovery and built the resilience of drought affected communities.

Below: Yarey Madim Dika pictured in front of the food shop that her self-help group set up in Yaballo



Understanding the drivers of hunger

Global food systems

Even before the Ukraine-Russia conflict, hunger was on the rise with 150 more million people affected by hunger in 2019⁵. Prices of commodities had risen to levels seen in other food price crises, as countries coped with the consequence of COVID-19 through restricting trade⁶ disrupting global supply chains, which were further strained by the outbreak of war in February 2022.

Although this year global food prices have fallen from earlier peaks, high food inflation persists and even exceeds⁷ overall inflation in most low-middle income countries remaining higher than before the onset of the pandemic⁸.

Profits of food trading and agrochemical corporations have skyrocketed over the past 2 years, with the biggest food trading companies seeing profits increase 45%⁹ - all the while global hunger surges. Increases in prices for chemical fertilisers have doubled and even tripled in some cases¹⁰, and 'speculative activity'¹¹ has exaggerated food prices. While the invasion of Ukraine and the pandemic did see a rise in global food prices, these events accelerated and amplified existing vulnerabilities in the global food system. Reports have indicated that unregulated commodity speculation¹² and the financialisation of food¹³ by monopolies has resulted in the centralisation of food access¹⁴, this led to profits rising faster and further than inflation, indicating we now in an era of 'greedflation'¹⁵.

The different parts of the food system are owned by a handful of companies which offer little choice to countries like Kenya who lack alternatives and are at the mercy of the markets and food speculation. This signals failures in the current global food systems, which does little to offer many solutions to low and middle-income countries reliant on food imports – for those already in grips of full-blown hunger¹⁶ are the ultimate victim of these failures.

The scourge of debt

The global debt crisis has been escalating at pace. Even before the onset of a pandemic¹⁷ we saw a decade of rising debt levels. Since the pandemic we have seen a 'global debt pandemic', exacerbated by the Ukraine war and rising inflation and interest rates, debt distressed countries do not have the fiscal space required to protect the basic economic and social rights of their

citizens, or to deliver social protection measures on food and key climate investments. In the face of increasing food insecurity and humanitarian need, global debt will trigger multiple shocks for low- and middle-income countries.

This has been true across the East Africa region, including Kenya, whose fiscal space has been overwhelmed by high debt loads, alongside rising food prices, increasing share of food imports¹⁸ and a weakening currency¹⁹ against the dollar.

Kenya's current debt ratio is over 65% of GDP, and in response the government has increased the tax burden²⁰ and removed any subsidies on maize and fuel²¹ which has severely limited purchasing power – leaving communities unable to afford three meals a day²².

The impacts of conflict

Conflict and hunger are inextricably linked, and the impacts of conflict have implications on availability and access to food, as conflict hampers production and trade, which can trigger surges in prices. The impact of the war in Ukraine has seen the fluctuation of global food and fertiliser prices, especially as the Black Sea Grain initiative – which ensured the passage of foodstuffs such as wheat, and fertilisers – had to be renegotiated and failed to be renewed in July²³. In response, India – which in 2022 accounted for 40% of global rice trade²⁴ – banned exports and added additional taxes on rice exports²⁵.

Low- and middle-income food importing countries are likely to be the most impacted²⁶. Countries in the MENA region²⁷ have been the most exposed to the impacts of the Black Sea grain, for example Lebanon is heavily dependent on imported grain with over 80% of wheat from Ukraine²⁸. Since the destruction of grain silos in 2020, and the multi-year economic crisis, Lebanon²⁹ has been acutely vulnerable to price shocks and shortages from the fallout of the war. In response the World Bank loaned Lebanon \$150 million to cover the cost of wheat imports until 2024. However, under current estimates funds will deplete by the end of this year³⁰.

To a lesser degree we have seen the impacts of Russia-Ukraine war across the Horn of Africa, with Somalia and Sudan the most dependent on imports of wheat to meet demands, through the initiative the East Africa region received over 800,000 tonnes³¹. Kenya was one of the receiving countries from the Black Sea, especially of wheat and corn from Ukraine³², in 2021 alone Kenya had imported 2.4 million tonnes of wheat from Ukraine³³. In the face of severe drought Kenya this saw the withdrawal of Russia from the Initiative as a 'stab in the back'³⁴.

The Sudan conflict

The conflict of Sudan which emerged earlier this year has added greater instability for the Horn of Africa and additional humanitarian pressures to the region. The conflict prompted the movement of people across the 7 countries bordering Sudan who were already facing hunger, conflict and insecurity. Since the onset of the conflict over 1 million people fled and the UN predicts this could reach almost 2 million by the .

The Climate Crisis

WFP reports that 80% of the world's hungry people are forced to live in areas prone to natural disasters and extreme weather³⁵ and in 2022 more than 110 million people in Africa were affected by weather and climate related hazards - of the 5000 fatalities reported 48% were associated with drought conditions³⁶. The climate crisis is increasing the severity and frequency of extreme flooding and droughts which will deepen food insecurity through declines in crop production and further the risks to health such as water borne diseases and increased prevalence of pests. Kenya for example, has reported multiple cholera outbreaks since October 2022 - by July of this year there were over 10,000 reported cases in the ASAL regions.

Over the past three years the weather phenomena La Niña has affected the East Africa region through drier conditions during the long rains. However, evidence is becoming clearer that climate change is altering El Niño and La Niña³⁷, resulting in longer and harsher droughts in La Niña years and warmer and wetter seasons in El Niño. This is causing a long-term decline in the amount of rainfall in the regional MAM rains and increasingly wet OND rains³⁸ indicating we will see greater vulnerability and risk of concurrent and consecutive droughts³⁹. Countries across the Horn are susceptible to protracted droughts, but over the last 100 years droughts have evolved in the region from 1 in 10⁴⁰ to a 1 in 3 event. Since the late 1990s⁴¹ droughts are occurring at alarming multi-year frequencies - and climate change has made the risk of droughts '100 times more likely'⁴² with the region experiencing three severe protracted droughts in the last ten years. The drought of 2020-2023, saw five consecutive failed rainy seasons triggering for the first time the WHO classifying the drought across East Africa as a grade three health emergency⁴³ - the highest crisis ranking.

The impact of the drought on Kenya

The extent of the drought for Kenya saw a rapid and unprecedented deterioration in food security and by September 2021 President Kenyatta declared the droughts a national disaster⁴⁴. This had a particular effect in the ASAL regions in Northern Kenya which is home to pastoralist and agropastoral communities. Although famine was not reached, communities remained in Crisis and Emergency levels throughout the drought period.

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'We depend on livestock and then the drought came. It was a long drought that killed all the livestock. There was no rain, people were hungry, there was nothing to eat,' Diboya says. "We have survived but we have not really caught up because all of the livestock died".

Before the drought Diboya's family had a small herd of 20 goats. but when the drought struck, it wiped out over half her herd, leaving her family with just six goats.

Below: Carcasses of dead cattle lying just off the road running between Watiti and Yaballo, Moyale, Marsabit



national disaster⁴⁵. This had a particular effect in the ASAL regions in Northern Kenya which is home to pastoralist and agropastoral communities. Although famine was not reached, communities remained in Crisis and Emergency levels throughout the drought period.

Drought conditions reduced agricultural productivity as the production of staple crops such as maize and sorghum declined, it displaced communities and caused widespread losses of livestock due to losses of available water sources and pasture – resulting in over 2.5 million⁴⁶ livestock deaths in Kenya. The loss of livestock for these communities in ASAL regions devastated local livelihoods and even saw the collapse of livestock markets⁴⁷, as livestock is a key source of ‘meat, milk and income’ for communities. When Christian Aid Ireland’s CEO travelled to Northern Kenya in July of this year many households reported⁴⁸ losing almost all their livestock. Women and girls bore the brunt of the impact as they are usually responsible for water, the severity of the drought forced women and girls ‘to travel long distances to fetch water for domestic consumption’⁴⁹. Kenya is experiencing cyclical and worsening food shocks, despite avoiding famine, during the drought millions of people were barely surviving. With every shock more will be pushed closer to famine, with the reality of future shocks a new approach is needed.

Driving focus towards resilience-building

Shifting from responding to emergencies to anticipating crisis

La Niña was subject to extensive early warnings, with the first warnings issued in late 2020⁵⁰ and named Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia as high priority countries. There were clear indicators that the food security situation was set to deteriorate and by the end of 2021, multiple agencies⁵¹ warned of the impacts of the drought on crop production, food access and availability, livestock mortality and livelihoods, especially when communities not having recovered from losses of herds during the drought of 2016/17.

Below: Drought affected landscape on the road out of Ngurnit in Laisamis, Marsabit county, northern Kenya. Credit: Katie Cox/Christian Aid.



Earlier droughts of 2011 and 2017 demonstrated the need for a proactive response to avert crisis, reduce costs and protect lives, livelihoods, and assets for communities. Despite the ‘threat of starvation’⁵² not enough action or funding was mobilised which could have mitigated the impacts and increased the effectiveness of food aid. Over the course of the multi-year drought financing gaps remained immense and political will waned. In June of 2022 at the height of the crisis, the Horn of Africa appeal was only 20% met, compared to the UN appeal for Ukraine which was 70% met. Further to this, no DEC appeal for the Horn was ever launched as it was judged to fail due to a ‘lack of media and public interest’.

Based on predicted forecasts of below average rainfall, anticipatory action could have been triggered for Somalia as early as August of 2020, and for Kenya in early 2021⁵³. Despite the number of people facing crisis levels of hunger doubling in only two years across the Horn, famine was never declared – as famine is fraught with both human and political connotations for communities, national governments, and the international community⁵⁴. Famine stimulates actors to respond, however its response requires vast national resources, drawing away long term investments and resilience, and furthermore signals failures of governance and failures of international actors to act early when lives and livelihoods could be saved with preventative measures.

As our ‘Ripping the Band Aid’ paper argues, these clear indicators of a deteriorating crisis governments and international agencies could have acted and limited the impact. Anticipatory approaches are designed to proactively respond to a crisis when risks – not needs increase – thus allowing

communities to preserve their resilience and avoid the losses due to crisis⁵⁵. Yet, despite 'clear, repeated and credible'⁵⁶ warnings, national structures and the wider international aid sector failed to respond to the scale of need and support locally led action.

However, what is critical to anticipatory approaches is the financing. Despite commitments, financing has not been forthcoming and untransparent in its delivery and without financing being dispensed early in the crisis, finance focused on emergency response. As Christian Aid's report maintains "the system needs to be more resilient not least by freeing up funding to invest in anticipatory action and pre-empting crisis" which is easily accessible.

Strengthening and uplifting communities through anticipatory action: Conflict Insights

Christian Aid has been leading anticipatory action as an innovative approach to mitigating the impacts of conflict around the Kenyan General Elections in August 2022. The months leading up to and after elections since 2007 have been the most violent periods for Kenya. In partnership with ADS, implemented the Election Anticipatory Alert project, across 5 counties including Uasin Gishu which was aimed at promoting peace messaging, sensitising communities and training community to respond and prepare a response to conflict triggers.

One young leader, Ken Cheruiyot became involved in peacebuilding initiatives in the county following the 2007 elections. Working with ADS he established an inter-faith group made up of religious leaders from the Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities to spread peace messaging to help reduce tensions.



Responding to hunger in a changing climate

In the face of conflict, economic shocks and the new normal of slow onset climate impacts we will witness the consequences of Loss and Damage. Climate change is increasing the likelihood of recurrent droughts and intense rainfall and is having further negative effects - prior to the historic drought, the Horn was plagued with a locust infestation not witnessed in decades⁵⁷, which was attributed to climate change impacts⁵⁸.

Between March and May 2023, as La Niña weakened, wetter-than-normal rains were experienced causing flash flooding owing to the indirect influence of the Cyclone Freddy. Following this El Niño which is attributed to above average rainfall in the Horn transformed the drought to rains. El Niño is predicated to be a strong event peaking from November

until early next year⁵⁹. Pastures and water resources have improved, but the arrival of the rains, whilst welcome, came with its own set of risks for drought affected communities- for Kenya this could result in more than 2 million people in need of assistance⁶⁰. Enhanced rains due to El Niño⁶¹ are already reported to be displacing drought affected communities, washing away crops and infrastructure – with UNOCHA reporting 6000 households already displaced.

These high impact climate events over 2022 and 2023 occurred consecutively, leaving little time for recovery between shocks, and compounding repeated impacts alongside protracted displacements, have decreased resilience of vulnerable communities to withstand more shocks. Considering the burden of Kenya's debt which is set to increase next year and is even reported to be looking for further financing⁶², this has severely impeded the ability to provide subsidies or invest in resilience, and so recovery is left to the most vulnerable.

Pastoralists who have already suffered further livestock losses and damages to livelihoods and infrastructure due to the rains⁶³, and these rains will not reverse the devastating impacts of three years of drought and recovery which will take years as pastoralist communities work to recover livestock.

Investment in resilience through strengthening local capacity, promoting locally led adaptation and including communities in decision making and climate monitoring is critical to ensuring anticipatory action can be effective. It becomes ever more necessary for national governments and the international donor community to act early and prepare financing in advance and scale up inclusive locally led⁶⁴ anticipatory action. Research has shown the cost effectiveness of early warning, early action, and resilience-building measures. These measures revealed a reduced demand for humanitarian response and reduced loss and damage and savings – ranging from \$2-36 for every \$1 spent on early warning and early action.

In the face of the potential impacts of El Niño a scaled up, coordinated and proactive approach at the national and international level is critical to enabling rapid action at the local level to reduce the impact as well as losses and enable action on emergency preparation. The FAO⁶⁵ have already surmised a response plan to the effects of El Niño, and for example have identified cash distribution for vulnerable households. At the national level KMD are coordinating on responses with humanitarian partners as they predict increased food insecurity⁶⁶.

Strengthening resilience: beyond the crisis

Community-led responses for resilience and recovery

The ASAL regions of Kenya are the most susceptible and vulnerable to the challenge of drought and where patterns of where Crisis and Emergency levels of hunger were most acute.

In response to the challenges brought by the severity of the drought, through transformative approaches which centre the needs of the community and strengthen communities' resilience and ability to withstand shocks. With funding from Irish Aid and Christian Aid's Hunger Appeal, in partnership with local actors PACIDA and CIFA we have been implementing a project using the survivor and community led (sclr) approach.

Findings from Christian Aid's response found that the approach was timely and effective in addressing community needs as well as strengthening communities' dignity, resilience and adaptive capacities. Through bringing the community together and ensuring their ownership of responses to interventions enabled people to meet their basic needs as it enhanced the effectiveness of support offered through our local partner PACIDA, built their skills and supported early recovery.

"We buy milk from the community at Kes 100 per litre, which is almost twice higher than they would sell to other off-takers locally. We then pasteurize the milk and sell in... and we make Kes 50 profit per litre. From the profits we make, we use it to help the other community members including buying food stuffs for the most needy".

Below: Members of the Namayana self-help group in Kamboe holding some of the milk cans they bought with the grant they received Credit: Katie Cox/Christian Aid.



What is survivor and community led approach to crisis

The sclr approach recognises that communities are the first and last responders to crisis. Through facilitating and supporting people-led micro-initiatives which tackle the root causes of vulnerability, Sclr strengthens the resilience of communities by developing responsiveness and recovery to crisis to enhance survival and strengthen solidarity, dignity and social cohesion. For example, using this approach in Laisamis, the Namayana Women Group were enabled to use profits from selling milk to buy medicine and supplies for their local health centre. By also paying a higher price for milk from local people more cash was available in the hands of vulnerable community members.

In response to the gendered impact of the drought, using the sclr approach enabled communities in Kalacha to identify barriers and develop solutions. Through our local partner PACIDA and community self-help and women's groups it was identified at a parents' meeting that the lack of facilities as well as hygiene kits was a key obstacle to girls attending school. Funded by Irish Aid through a grant from Christian to PACIDA, 2 latrines were built, and this saw an increase in girls' participation in schooling. Christian Aid and our partners, PACIDA and CIFA experiences of survivor-led approaches provide evidence that a decentralised method to tackling crisis, and it is key to strengthening collective resilience – approaches which do not centre the community are only a band-aid.

Below: A reusable sanitary towel Credit: Katie Cox/Christian Aid.



Below: CEO of Christian Aid Ireland Rosamond Bennett pictured with schoolgirl Felista Lengerpei in Ngurnit junior secondary school in Ngurnit, Laisamis, Marsabit county Credit: Katie Cox/Christian Aid.



Conclusions and our recommendations

How are current barriers reinforcing the crisis cycle

We are amid back-to-back crises – El Niño will only enhance what La Niña left behind. El Niño is considered a threat multiplier and could even deepen conflict⁶⁷, and as El Niño conditions are expected strengthen, this will influence food security outcomes. Given drought affected communities have had no time to recover efforts need to be ramped up now to minimise further effects on lives and livelihoods.

There are many lessons to be learned and the failure to respond at the necessary speed and scale to the hunger crisis, as well as many donors not engaging on the interconnected issues which compound crisis, such as climate and debt. This limits effective humanitarian response which is resulting in

increasing trends of hunger and child undernutrition- and is ultimately undermining the resilience of vulnerable communities. Drawing on learnings and on our analysis in 'Ripping the Band Aid', we highlight the following recommendations.

What are the solutions; From the local and national level to donors and the international community

Responding to warning and enhancing local capacity and resilience

- All available funding in humanitarian and development funding pipelines should be released to the front line and in line with global commitments must be flexible, multiyear, and predictable, with pre-financing available to respond to early warnings with anticipatory action.
- Supporting the scale-up of locally driven and decentralised resilience strengthening approaches will see better outcomes in response to crisis as communities will be able to meet their needs.
- Through equitable local partnerships, with support of community networks and local responders, and the participation of affected communities to deliver an early and timely response such as through selling livestock or moving from places facing imminent floods⁶⁸, however cattle is valued as part of social capital and so approaches should be appropriate to the local context. Coupled with this, learnings have identified the need to better include government technical staff and the GoK must invest in their capacities to strengthen institutional processes as part of approaches to better address needs.
- Last year the new GoK had to content with the reality of the drought and hunger crisis, announced 2bnKES for drought⁶⁹ affected counties. Although this was needed, the GoK should invest in enhancing local capacities to build people's resilience. From the learnings of our sclr approach in Northern Kenya, utilising the local structures such as community elders was key to minimising conflict and identifying the most vulnerable within the community and the GOK should use these approaches of resilience building.

Connecting the dots: the nexus approach

- Given the trends of a decline in humanitarian funding, using nexus approaches through supporting and incentivising a joined-up approach between humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation.

- International agencies and bodies, the national government must prepare for future climate events by prioritising and positioning early warning and early action as a resilience approach and ensure different funding mechanisms are coherent and layered to best respond to the different stages of crisis.
- In 2012 agencies called out the slow response of the international system and the costs associated with the poor response, yet the same errors were repeated – however it is clearly evidenced that utilising early warning and early action is cost effective and reduces humanitarian need.
- With the upcoming COP28, developed countries need to implement agreements from COP26, which committed to doubling the amount of adaptation finance by 2025, alongside this locally led adaptation must be scaled up which prioritises those most vulnerable to climate risks.
- To ensure a holistic response, alongside early action and anticipatory approaches, responses to Climate Change Loss and Damage should address three challenges.
 - the ex-ante potential for reducing losses through resilience building,
 - the ex-post challenges of recovery and rehabilitation from loss and damage,
 - lastly the challenges of having to cope with permanent losses.

Tackling global food systems through agroecology

- Global agricultural and fertiliser companies are profiting from agricultural communities growing reliance on fossil fuels-based agrochemical inputs. Through agroecology methods decreasing farmers reliance by turning to organic fertilisers will build resilience to both price hikes and climate extremes.
- Vulnerable communities most reliant on agriculture are vulnerable to global food markets and food chain dysfunction. Countries like Kenya have had to rely on food imports to meet needs, but this comes at a huge cost. There is a need to limit this vulnerability through a transition to climate sensitive local food chains based on agroecology to greater localise food chains and systems.

Tackling the issue of debt

- The government and the international community should always put human rights principles – including the right to food before paying debt. The GOK and creditors to agree on debt cancellations or restructuring so that the GOK have

more head room to address urgent crisis and strengthening resilience to climate and conflict.

- The response by the GoK to increase the tax burden will disproportionately harm those who are in the most vulnerable to hunger. In debt negotiations the GoK must ensure social protections and international humanitarian principles are not weakened or compromised.
- Donor countries such as the UK has the capabilities to support indebted countries through stronger legislation which compels private creditors to engage in debt restructuring mechanisms.

Endnotes

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