

COMMITTED OR COMPLACENT: A FAILING RESPONSE TO THE 2019 HORN OF AFRICA DROUGHT CRISIS

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OXFAM



Photo: Pablo Tasco/Oxfam

As drought devastates the Horn of Africa yet again, the following analysis comparing 2019 to earlier droughts paints a bleak picture and indictment on the humanitarian community. The urgency to better respond is exacerbated by people's lack of recovery from the 2017 drought and a further deterioration predicted in coming months. The slow response to the 2011 drought was widely recognised¹ as an immense failure that contributed to the famine that killed over 260,000 people in Somalia, and devastated Ethiopia and Kenya. Recognising and learning from that failure, the humanitarian community vowed it would never happen again. As drought took hold in 2017 in the Horn, the humanitarian response was more timely, relatively well resourced and better targeted than 2011, and largely hailed a success as famine was averted. Only two years on, the Horn finds itself yet again on the precipice of catastrophe, yet the humanitarian response to date is woefully inadequate. Are we committed to ensuring the type of response that we know averted famine in 2017 or have we fallen back into the complacency that contributed to the 2011 famine? It is a matter of political will, where we know early intervention save lives.

2019, 2017 AND 2011 AT A GLANCE

JUNE 2019	15.3 million people require humanitarian assistance and 5.6 million people are displaced. Funding of Ethiopia and Somalia's Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) are collectively only 35.4%. The funding gap to December 2019 is US\$1.5 billion.
JUNE 2017	17.1 million people required assistance. 2.1 million people were internally displaced. The Ethiopia and (original) Somalia HRPs were 74.8% funded. The funding gap was \$456 million. ¹
JUNE 2011	9.8 million people required assistance (rising to 12.2m by end of July). 2.1 million people internally displaced. The Horn HRP (including Kenya) was 46.5% funded.

¹ If using Somalia's revised (due to drought intensification) 2017 HRP, the total was 55.4% funded with a gap of US\$1.1 billion. However, doing so would mean the 2019-2017 comparison is not like for like. Somalia's 2019 HRP hasn't been revised. Instead, a separate drought response plan was issued for June to December, thus rendering the original HRPs best for comparative sake.

DROUGHTS COMPARISON: MAJOR FINDINGS

2019 need vastly higher, yet funding much lower than 2011

2019 funding less than half of 2017³

2.7 times the number of IDPs⁴ in 2019 than 2011/2017

- The June 2019 number of people requiring humanitarian assistance² across the Horn is 56% higher than in June 2011 and 25% higher than July 2011, the month famine was declared in Somalia.
- Despite vastly higher humanitarian need, the 2019 combined Horn response plans are only 35.4% funded as of July, whereas even the disastrous famine year of 2011 was better funded at 46.5% by July.

The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance in June 2019 is only 11% less than June 2017, but whereas 2017 had secured 74.8% of required funding at this point, 2019 figures are less than half that, at a meagre 35.4%.

In both 2011 and 2017, 2.1 million people were internally displaced in the Horn, but in 2019 it's a staggering 5.8 million people. This difference is indicative of the lack of recovery, with people stuck in protracted displacement and precarious living conditions.

JUNE 2019 DROUGHT FIGURESⁱⁱ



2 The term 'in need of humanitarian assistance', 'food insecure' and other terms are used interchangeably and inconsistently by different actors. The one term is used for this paper.

3 Funding comparisons throughout refer to the percentage funding of HRPs, as this provides the most accurate and like-for-like comparison between the years because HRPs are tailored according to each year's need, rather than looking at the absolute sums of funding, which varies significantly according to yearly need.

4 IDP refers to people displaced by drought and/or armed conflict in each year of analysis, both of which are often intertwined, such as clashes over scarce water resources.

5 Figures don't differentiate between drought and non-drought humanitarian need, but this is the case for both 2017 and 2019, thus the comparison remains valid.

6 The term 'acute food stress', 'severe food stress', IPC3/4 and other terms are used interchangeably and inconsistently by different actors. The one term is used for this paper. Ethiopia figure is 'people in need of immediate life-saving assistance.'

7 To have an accurate 2017 comparison, figure includes \$59.7m outside of HRP, as detailed on <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/667/summary> (accessed 7/7/19).

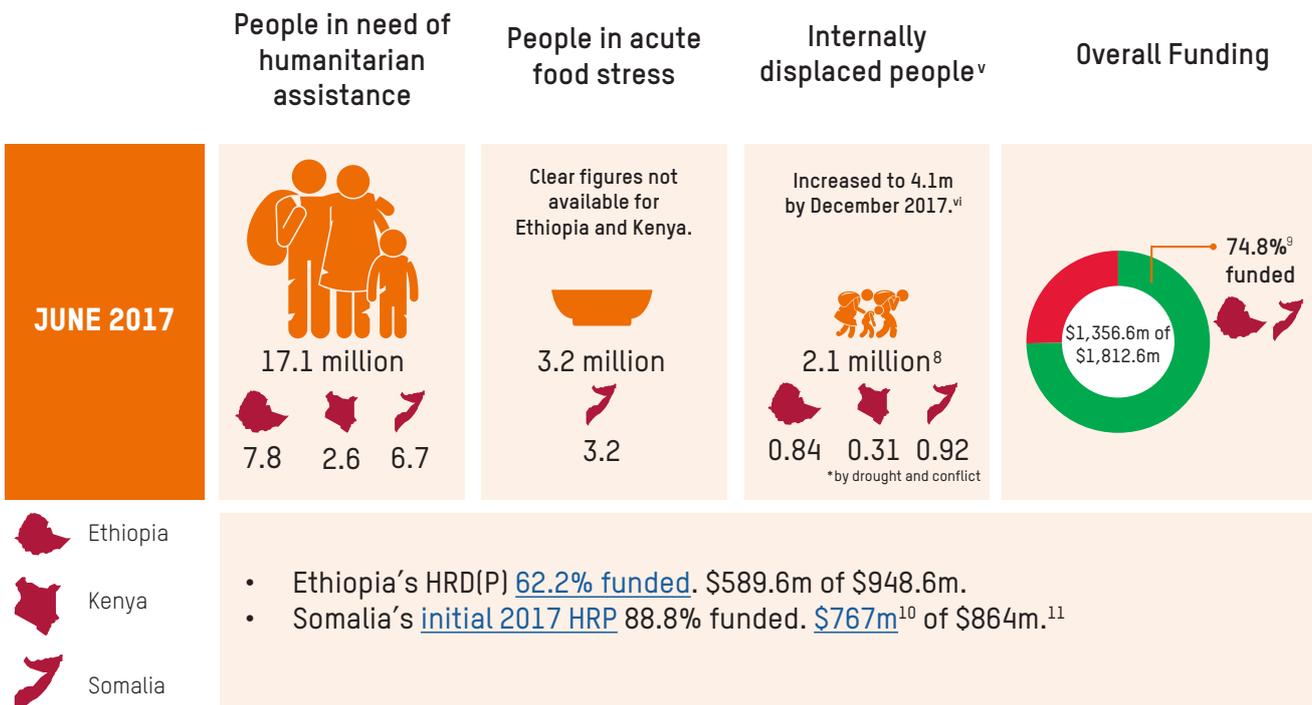
It cannot be said the 2019 Horn drought has caught people by surprise. [Oxfam](#), [FEWSNET](#) and other actors have been sounding the alarm for months, but with muted responses. June saw a substantial uptick in funding flows with the US Government allocating US\$185m and UK £8m for Somalia, and the EU €110m and CERF US\$45m for the Horn, yet as the overall figures demonstrate, funding still remains severely inadequate, and far less than 2011 and 2017. Not captured in the numbers is the reality that most people have not recovered from the 2017 drought, meaning existing vulnerability was already high. The rapidly increasing number of people requiring assistance in the first half of 2019 and the high number of IDPs demonstrates this vulnerability.

The outlook for coming months indicates further deterioration, where [FEWSNET](#), amongst others, are predicting increasing humanitarian need and continuing dry conditions. Complacency must be replaced by commitment.

Sporadic rains in May and June have provided scant relief, in some cases causing significant [instances of flooding](#), and due to a lack of livestock, most people are unable to capitalise on any new pasture. As a displaced Somali woman, Halimo, explains:



JUNE 2017 DROUGHT FIGURES^{iv}



8 September 2017 figures used because [June 2017 figures](#) of 1.6m were unclear between drought, refugee and other displaced people. Thus, September 2017 offers a better like-for-like comparison to the 2019 figures in terms of who is included.

9 If using the revised Somalia HRP, funding was \$1,356.6 of \$2,448.6m, 55.4%, but that is not a like-for-like comparison to 2011 and 2019.

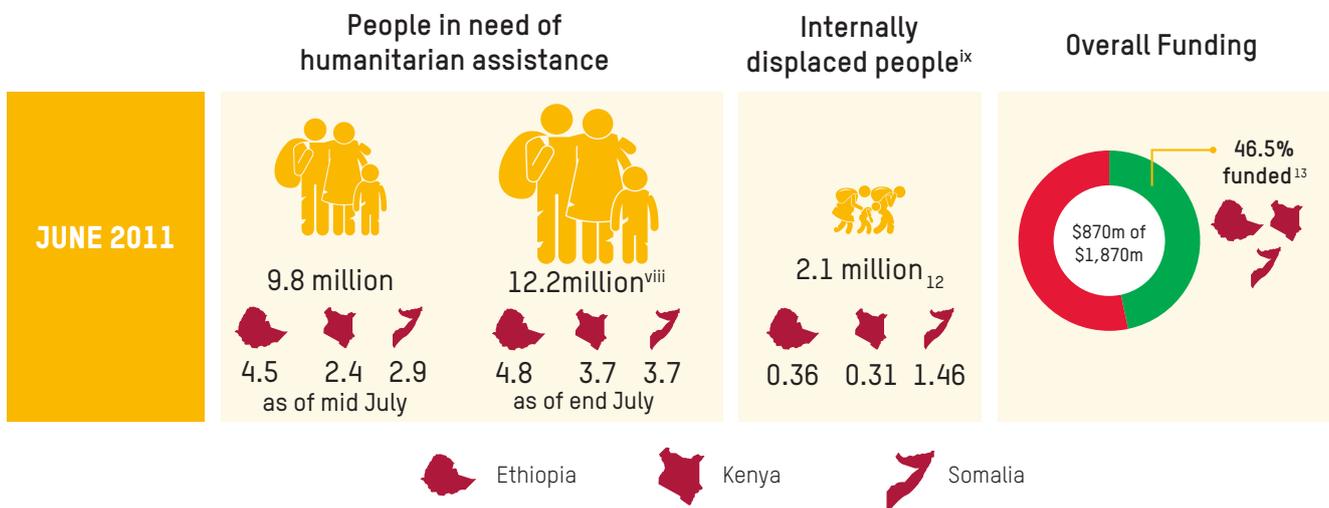
10 Includes funds committed in late June, but this is comparable to 2019, where major funds were allocated in late June. Also includes \$210m out of the HRP, which is also included in 2019 to ensure like-for-like comparison.

11 If using Somalia's [revised 2017 HRP of \\$1,500m](#), it would have been [51.1% funded](#) as of June 2017. \$767m of \$1,500m.

The 2017 Horn drought response was regarded as a relative success with famine averted, where large-scale, timely funding was the foundation for an effective response. Conscious of the failure of 2011 and lessons learned, warnings were made as early as [March 2016](#). In February 2017, well before the mid-year deterioration in conditions, a [call to action](#) was made about the severity of the drought crisis, a critical moment for ensuring an appropriate response. It's also important to note that compared to 2019, people's resilience was arguably higher in 2017 because it had been six years since the last major drought, whereas in 2019 many people are yet to recover from the 2017 drought.

The diversity and solidarity of actors mobilising funds for the response were also critical in 2017. Ethiopian, Kenyan and Somali authorities were proactive in responding. The EU, UK and US promptly allocated major funding and played a central role in mobilising the international community and donors. The AU and UN [headed a delegation](#) to the region to reinforce the need for support. The African Development Bank [urged acceleration](#) of existing large-scale drought resilience programming. The private sector also mobilised substantive resources. [Oxfam](#) and other actors activated funding appeals, scaled up responses and mobilised influencing networks. The collective, persistent and timely efforts ensured 2017 was not a repeat of the 2011 famine. What will 2019 be?

JUNE 2011 DROUGHT FIGURES^{vii}



The 2011 Horn drought response was a collective failure of the humanitarian system, devastating all three countries, but particularly the famine in Somalia. Subsequent reviews by DfID, Oxfam and others* highlighted inadequate early warning systems, slow mobilisation of resources and ultimately a failed response that meant famine was not averted. The humanitarian sector was caught off guard with people requiring humanitarian assistance escalating from 8.8m in May to more than 12m by the end of July. An [alarm was raised](#) in June of the pending crisis, but it was too late. By July 20th, the [UN declared famine](#) in parts of Somalia. A major lesson was that even though a drought may be a slow onset crisis, the impact can rapidly spiral out of control. There are significant parallels with the current 2019 situation, where humanitarian need has rapidly escalated in the

first half of 2019, while funding and responses languish.

The numbers comparison between 2011 and 2019 is stark. **Humanitarian need in 2019 is over 50% more than 2011, but the percentage funding of the 2019 HRPs is substantially less than 2011.** The number of internally displaced people in 2019 is also more than 2.7X higher than in 2011. While humanitarian access may have improved in 2019, particularly in Somalia, and arguably the humanitarian system is better prepared, the figures for 2019 paint an even more concerning picture than 2011. Scrambling to make up lost time, mass resource mobilisation occurred in 2011, such as an African Union [pledging conference](#) raising US\$350m, but it was too late for the more than 260,000 people who died from famine. Is 2019 going to be a repeat of the failures of 2011?

¹² September 2011 figures used because June figures heavily fluctuating.

¹³ Kenya was included as a major recipient for HRP funding in 2011, but since graduating to middle income status in 2015 is not included in later HRPs.

PEOPLE NOT NUMBERS

The numbers presented in this paper are bleak and alone are cause for urgent, expanded action, but ultimately these numbers come down to people. A Somali still displaced from the 2017 drought, Jama, describes the fragile reality behind the numbers:



"I don't even have words to describe the impact (of the 2017 drought). We lost all of our livestock. Thank Allah we didn't lose people. Losing all our livestock devastated the community. Oxfam and HAVOYOCO have helped a lot, but we are still feeling the drought impacts... We are still waiting on help to recover. Nobody is providing enough support. Small-scale support isn't enough...

I'm pessimistic because if the current situation continues and drought reappears, it will just get worse. If there are no solutions and the situation doesn't improve, we will lose everyone here. I'm afraid of losing people."

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE ANALYSIS

Donor fatigue is often cited as a key reason for the current lack of funding from the international community for the 2019 drought, but it's also important to recognise the substantial achievements of governments in the Horn. In 2011, Kenya was a large recipient of international humanitarian funding for the drought, but since graduating to middle income status in 2015, receives far less funding. This is also in recognition that the Kenyan government has and continues to improve its capacity to respond and address chronic vulnerability, such as through the Hunger Safety Net Programme. In Ethiopia, the government continues demonstrating commitment and ability to deliver humanitarian response, with 47% of confirmed funding for the 2019 HRP coming from the Ethiopian government. In Somalia, the government has made significant progress in stabilising the country, improving humanitarian access and coordinating responses, but remains the most resource constrained of the three countries,

thus being the largest per capita recipient of international funding.

From Crisis Response to Climate Resilience

The analysis in this paper prioritises focus on the urgency of the humanitarian crisis, but the increasing regularity and intensity of droughts, floods and climatic shocks in the Horn is a complex reality that must be embedded within the reality of the global climate crisis. An immediate and sufficiently funded humanitarian response is urgently needed, but longer-term attention must also be paid to broader dynamics such as the climate crisis and other causes of vulnerability in the Horn. Review of the 2011 response led to commitment towards building long-term resilience, including the emergence of significant resilience programmes, but as the recurring humanitarian need suggests, much more needs to be done to ensure widespread and genuine resilience. The World Bank estimates that for every dollar spent on disaster risk reduction, seven dollars is saved in recovery^{xi}. Resilience building, disaster risk

reduction and addressing other systemic issues that exacerbate humanitarian crises must be prioritised both by local and national authorities, and the international community.

OXFAM AND PARTNERS' WORK IN THE HORN

Oxfam works directly and with a multitude of partners across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, reaching many of the most vulnerable communities. Our current operations are reaching hundreds of thousands of people, and millions during the past decade of droughts. We have been active in the region for over 40 years, including critical support to local and national civil society actors. Halima Adan, Deputy Director of (Oxfam partner) Save Somali Women and Children provides some perspective on the current crisis:

“We are all too familiar with the devastation of droughts, with 2019 exceptionally bad for the slowness of the response. The inadequacies of the current response mean women’s burdens and vulnerability are increasing. In often hostile environments, local actors are best placed to reach those most in need, where emphasis must be on reaching women and children.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous findings and statistics are striking



and must not be understood as simply raising the alarm, but as an urgent call to action by all actors, national and international. Many humanitarian actors¹⁴ have raised the alarm and are already responding, but are unable to meet the scale of need. The following are key recommendations:

Local and National Authorities

- Allocate maximum possible funding to the humanitarian response/s, prioritising targeting of those identified as the most vulnerable, and ensuring resilience building is integrated into humanitarian response.
- Utilise a gender lens to ensure all interventions are implemented in a way that contribute towards advancing women’s empowerment.
- Ensure coordinated humanitarian response/s and rapidly address any potential impediments to effective response, including any restraints on humanitarian access.
- Increase commitments towards and investments for the most affected populations, including addressing issues such as dimensions of inequalities, access to services and food security.
- Utilise influence to mobilise regional institutions, such as the AU and IGAD, for political, fundraising and other support.

International Community

- A delayed response cost over 250,000 lives in 2011, donors must respond now to avoid catastrophe, in line with localisation and women’s empowerment commitments.
- Advocate to and mobilise broader international support to address the crisis, where the AU, EU, IGAD, UK and US have all played instrumental roles in earlier Horn drought crises.
- Allocate as much funding as directly as possible to local and national humanitarian actors, in line with grand bargain commitments. This must be matched with local and national representation and influence in the humanitarian architecture and decision-making mechanisms.
- Given the increasing regularity of droughts and climatic disasters in the Horn, dedicate greater long-term funding and attention to addressing broader systemic causes of acute vulnerability, including issues such as various inequality dynamics and Somalia’s national debt burden.

¹⁴ [Oxfam](#) and [FEWSNET](#) in March, [Nexus Platform](#) in June, and many more.



Humanitarian Responders

- Prioritise support for the most vulnerable, including not just women, children, elderly and people with disabilities, but also ethnic minorities and minority clans that often have the weakest coping mechanisms.
- Tailor interventions to also advance broader women's empowerment, such as influence in decision-making and leadership.
- Considering the urgency and scale of food insecurity, prioritise rapid cash transfers and social safety net interventions, albeit in accordance with needs assessments.
- Coordinate with local authorities and align interventions with national development, disaster and similar strategies/plans.
- Prioritise working with local and national civil society as much as possible, not just for funding, but also in recognition of their long-term role in the Horn for addressing resilience, rights and other issues.
- Mobilise maximum institutional capacity, funding and will to ensure adequate attention and action is directed towards this crisis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

Extensive effort has been made to ensure the comparative analysis presented here is as like-for-like as possible. Key steps include focusing on June figures for each year in focus and utilising OCHA figures to ensure consistency. A deliberate

decision was made to collect individual country data and then combine it into the overall Horn figures presented, as preliminary analysis showed some significant discrepancies between national and collated Horn figures. As such, there may be some differences between figures presented here and collated Horn drought figures presented elsewhere. References are included. Despite these steps to ensure like-for-like comparisons, the following are some key limitations of the analysis:

- Seasonal fluctuations, particularly rain patterns, can significantly impact figures month-to-month, even if June figures are consistently used.
- The figures don't necessarily capture the level of vulnerability, where the 2019 situation is arguably more fragile than previous years because of the lack of recovery from 2017.
- Gender disaggregated figures are unavailable, but we know from community engagement, women are facing the most acute hardships that aren't often captured in overall figures.
- Different actors use terms such as food insecure, people in need of humanitarian assistance, IPC classifications and other terms inconsistently. Consistent terms have been used in the analysis, and utilising primarily OCHA figures has reduced any potential discrepancies.
- The figures included don't always differentiate between drought and other causes of humanitarian need, but once again, a

consistent approach has been taken to ensure like-for-like comparison.

- Other dynamics can also influence the ability to respond, such as armed conflict in Somalia being less in 2019 than earlier years, the persisting humanitarian caseload in 2017 making it easier to scale up responses in 2019 and Kenya being declared middle income in 2015 with related impacts on funding flows. However, these dynamics are no cause for complacency. The figures demonstrate the severity of the crisis even when taking such factors into consideration, while the lack of recovery from 2017 also exacerbates fragility in 2019.

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Photo: Dustin Barter/Oxfam

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