

The Mashariki Today

Addressing Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa



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For nearly two decades, the Horn of Africa—encompassing Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti—has faced severe food insecurity. This persistent crisis is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including climate change, ongoing conflicts, political instability, and economic challenges. Systemic deficiencies in infrastructure and governance further exacerbate the situation.¹ System based deficiencies in the Horn of Africa significantly contribute to food insecurity by creating barriers to effective response and resilience-building efforts. Weak governance structures often fail to coordinate adequate disaster response or allocate resources for long-term agricultural development. Moreover, poor infrastructure, such as inadequate transportation networks in countries such as Ethiopia,² hampers food distribution, making it difficult for aid or agricultural products to reach the most vulnerable communities. Additionally, fragmented systems of land ownership, water management, and market regulation prevent farmers from accessing the tools needed for sustainable production, leading to recurring cycles of famine and food shortages.

By 2023, approximately 36.4 million people in the Horn of Africa were experiencing hunger, with 21.7 million in urgent need of food assistance.³ In 2024, the World Health Organization's assessment of food insecurity in the Greater Horn of Africa revealed that nearly 50.1 million people were affected by severe food insecurity.⁴ These figures underline the deepening crisis and highlight the need for immediate,

coordinated interventions. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the key drivers of food insecurity in the Horn of Africa and offers targeted policy recommendations based on the commitments made in the Maputo⁵ and Malabo⁶ Declarations to address these pressing challenges.



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Climate Change

Climate change significantly contributes to food insecurity in the Horn of Africa. The region is particularly vulnerable to adverse weather conditions, including extreme droughts and floods, which directly impact agricultural production. For example, in Kenya, the 2022 drought led to a 30% reduction in crop yields, leaving 4.3 million people in need of food aid.⁷ A 2024 report by the REACH Initiative reveals that communities in Turkana were severely impacted by the 2022 drought and the 2024 flooding, with 49% of households experiencing food insecurity.⁸ Tanzania experienced a 25% decrease in crop yields due to irregular rainfall, and the 2023 floods inundated 20,000 hectares of farmland.⁹ Ethiopia faces similar issues, with a 40% decline in livestock production during the 2021 drought, affecting over 7 million people. These case studies underscore the urgent need for effective climate adaptation strategies to address the growing food security challenges in the region.

Recent projections suggest that climate change will exacerbate these challenges, with increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events. At COP 29, discussions are expected to focus on enhancing international support for climate adaptation, stressing the importance of innovative solutions to bolster agricultural resilience and improve water management.¹⁰ The UN Summit of the Future will further address global strategies for adaptation, reflecting recent debates and outcomes. Concurrently, the African Union is advancing its Climate Strategy and the African Adaptation Initiative, while IGAD's Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) is working on refining regional climate forecasts and adaptation measures. These efforts collectively highlight the critical need for integrated climate adaptation strategies to tackle the growing food security challenges in the Horn of Africa.

Political instability and Conflicts

Conflicts and political instability have profoundly affected food security in the Horn of Africa, with armed conflicts disrupting agricultural activities, destroying infrastructure, and displacing populations, all of which contribute to severe food shortages and humanitarian crises. The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, which lasted from November 2020 until the signing of the Pretoria Agreement in November 2022, is a prime example. During the two-year conflict,

agricultural production was crippled, infrastructure was severely damaged, and millions of people were displaced, exacerbating the already dire food insecurity in the region. Although the Pretoria Agreement has brought a formal end to hostilities, the lingering effects of the conflict continue to hamper recovery efforts, highlighting the long-term impact of political instability on food systems and the urgent need for sustained peacebuilding initiatives to restore agricultural production and access to food in affected areas.

At its peak, the United Nations reported that millions of people in Tigray faced extreme food insecurity. The United Nations, Secretary General in 2021¹², highlighted that nearly 400,000 people were living in famine-like conditions. Further, a report by the Human Rights Watch, claimed that the Ethiopian government was using famine as a weapon of war, resulting in 77.38% of households in Tigray becoming food insecure.¹³

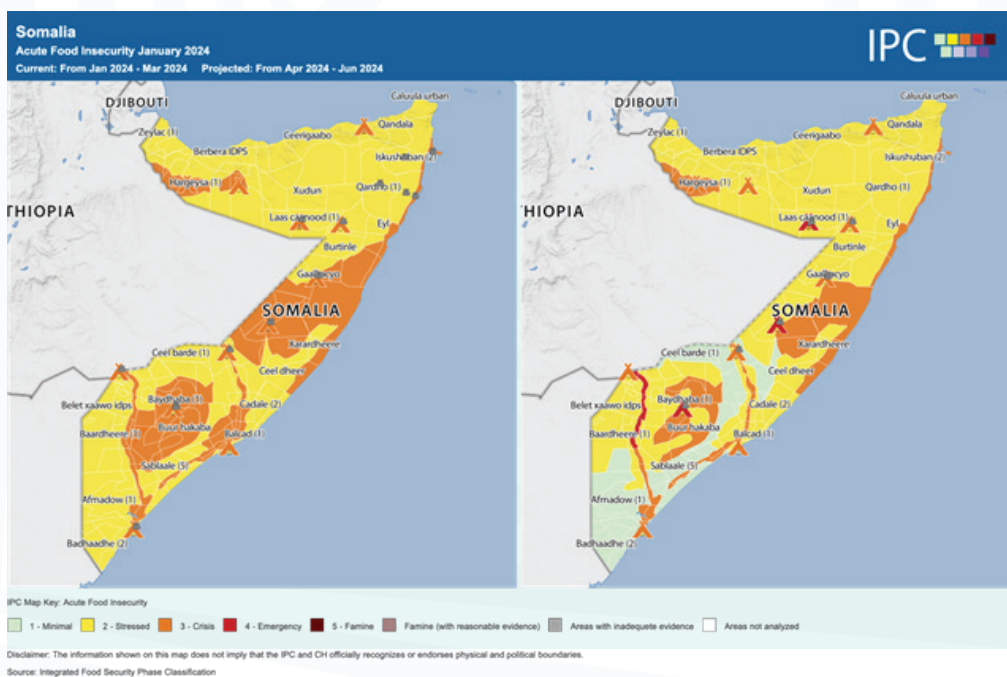
Separately, in Somalia, prolonged civil unrest and militant activities have greatly hindered access to food and agricultural resources. The country has recently experienced devastating floods,¹⁴ which have compounded the existing food insecurity. The ongoing instability disrupts farming activities and trade, driving up food prices and limiting access to essential commodities. In 2023, Somalia was placed at the top of the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) Emergency Watchlist for countries at the greatest risk of worsening humanitarian crises.¹⁵ Equally, the country previously endured five consecutive below-average rainy seasons, and its dependency on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia has exacerbated the situation following the war in Ukraine.¹⁶ Consequently, global price increases and Somalia's limited domestic food production capacity have exacerbated food insecurity. In early 2024, heavy rainfall and flooding—compounded by the lingering effects of previous droughts—is reported to have driven 4 million people, or 21 percent of the population, into high levels of food insecurity, classified as IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse) between January and March 2024.¹⁷ Somalia's prolonged conflict, coupled with recent floods and environmental shocks, has created a dire humanitarian situation, characterized by state collapse, clan factionalism, and ongoing armed struggles.

Population table of people affected by food insecurity per region in Somalia between January – March 2024 (Source: IPCinfo.org)

Region	Total population analysed	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3		Phase 4		Phase 5		Phase 3+	
		#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%
Awdal	636,108	278,310	44%	261,190	41%	88,070	14%	8,550	1%	0	0%	96,620	15%
Bakool	543,371	281,370	52%	163,820	30%	86,660	16%	11,540	2%	0	0%	98,200	18%
Banadir	3,171,391	1,508,260	48%	975,110	31%	523,100	16%	164,930	5%	0	0%	688,030	22%
Bari	1,232,231	618,490	50%	391,200	32%	163,400	13%	59,130	5%	0	0%	222,530	18%
Bay	1,247,975	435,460	35%	354,590	28%	344,410	28%	113,480	9%	0	0%	457,890	37%
Galgaduud	812,638	321,240	40%	288,210	35%	165,850	20%	37,350	5%	0	0%	203,200	25%
Gedo	975,586	464,120	48%	301,020	31%	155,570	16%	54,890	6%	0	0%	210,460	22%
Hiraan	504,816	255,440	51%	147,880	29%	89,150	18%	12,380	2%	0	0%	101,530	20%
L. Juba	1,158,256	599,660	52%	339,960	29%	162,980	14%	55,660	5%	0	0%	218,640	19%

MRPC Commentary

L. Shabelle	1,593,117	700,630	4 4 %	493,23 0	31 %	331,87 0	21 %	67,4 00	4 %	0	0	399,270	25 %
M. Juba	430,129	219,750	5 1 %	144,29 0	34 %	51,870	12 %	14,1 60	3 %	0	0	66,030	15 %
M. Shabelle	1,013,352	440,350	4 3 %	352,81 0	35 %	175,90 0	17 %	44,2 90	4 %	0	0	220,190	22 %
Mudug	1,470,309	588,830	4 0 %	528,58 0	36 %	304,03 0	21 %	48,8 80	3 %	0	0	352,910	24 %
Nugaal	631,810	320,870	5 1 %	198,60 0	31 %	99,010	16 %	13,3 40	2 %	0	0	112,350	18 %
Sanaag	428,699	215,280	5 0 %	143,82 0	34 %	63,470	15 %	6,1 30	1 %	0	0	69,600	16 %
Sool	548,975	261,420	4 8 %	185,28 0	34 %	83,570	15 %	18,6 90	3 %	0	0	102,260	19 %
Togdheer	860,684	414,790	4 8 %	295,50 0	34 %	112,43 0	13 %	37,9 60	4 %	0	0	150,390	17 %
W. Galbeed	1,447,484	671,890	4 6 %	537,56 0	37 %	204,74 0	14 %	33,2 70	2 %	0	0	238,010	16 %
Total	18,706,931	8,596,160	4 6 %	6,102,650	3 3 %	3,206,080	1 7 %	802,030	4 %	0	0	4,008,110	2 1 %

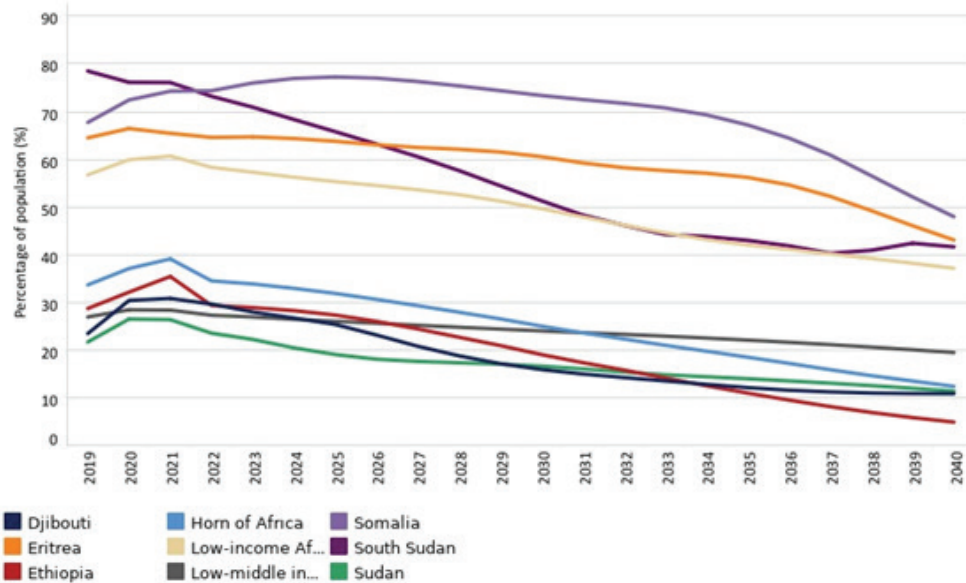


Source: *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2024.*

Economic Shocks

At the root of the Horn of Africa food insecurity are economic challenges. The high levels of poverty hamper households from obtaining enough nutritious food. Most people of the region try to make their lives on less than \$1.90 per day as shown in the graph below, the international poverty line set by the World Bank.¹⁸ Furthermore, these economic shocks are expected to continue impacting the region through 2040, as indicated by a study from the Institute for Security Studies, also presented below. Key factors contributing to these economic shocks include ongoing conflict and political instability, which exacerbate the situation.

Chart 12: Trends in income poverty in the Horn of Africa (<US\$ 1.90 per day)



Source: Forecast in IFs version 7.63, historical data for the World Bank

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Source: *African Futures, 2024, ISS*

This abject poverty limits them from investing either in agriculture or purchasing foodstuffs, hence making them highly vulnerable to the food insecurity. Similarly, high food prices only heighten the problem. Unreliable markets, disrupted supply chains, and inflation lead to high prices of food, hence putting stress on household budgets and reducing access to food. For example, the prices of commodities like maize and wheat have skyrocketed in recent years owing to disturbed supply chains and fluctuations in the international market.¹⁹

In addition to these challenges, economic opportunities are further constrained by inadequate access to financial services. Furthermore, poor infrastructure, including substandard roads and inadequate storage facilities, hampers farmers' ability to reach broader markets and sell their produce at fair prices. This not only reduces their incomes but also leads to significant post-harvest losses, further diminishing food availability.

Poor Infrastructure

Shortfalls in infrastructure continue to play a significant role in propelling food insecurity in the Horn of Africa.²⁰ Poorly developed roads, storage, and irrigation systems in Somalia²¹ for instance have affected agricultural productivity and food distribution negatively. For example, the poorly developed road network contributes to the problem of moving farmers' produce to the markets. This increases the cost of transportation and depressed profits.

Inadequate irrigation systems exacerbate the impact of drought and erratic rainfall. This is because, with the absence of reliable irrigation, crop production cannot withstand the drought period; thus, insufficient yields and heightened susceptibility to food insecurity result. Investment in agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation machinery should continue in order to cushion agricultural sectors from the adverse impacts of climate variability.



Policy Recommendations

Addressing food insecurity in the Horn of Africa requires varied approaches with a strong emphasis on enhancing climate resilience. Key strategies include investing in climate-smart agriculture, such as developing drought-resistant crops, improving land management, and expanding irrigation systems. Supporting agricultural research and community-based adaptation, including early warning systems and farmer knowledge sharing, is crucial. Additionally, promoting climate-resilient practices and disaster preparedness can help farmers manage climate-related risks.

To mitigate the impact of conflicts on food production, addressing their root causes and fostering political stability is essential. Efforts, such as the deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the IGAD-led peace processes in address the South Sudan crisis, demonstrate the role of regional and international bodies in conflict resolution. AMISOM's stabilization efforts have improved humanitarian access and agricultural recovery in Somalia, while IGAD's involvement in South Sudan's peace process has been pivotal in reducing violence and fostering dialogue.

Local engagement in peacebuilding and addressing grievances is critical for enabling food production recovery. Strengthening the rule of law and governance in conflict-affected areas such as Somalia, supports effective implementation of food security policies and access to resources. Improving economic opportunities and market access is also vital. Policies should focus on enhancing financial access, stabilizing food prices, and investing in rural infrastructure, including roads and storage facilities. Public-private partnerships can equally play a significant role in delivering these infrastructural projects efficiently.

Regional cooperation is crucial for enhancing food security by improving infrastructure and market access. Regional bodies like IGAD can coordinate joint initiatives, and regional trade agreements, such as the East African

Community (EAC) Common Market Protocol, which can lower food prices and improve market access. This benefits both consumers and producers, increasing income and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Finally, enhancing food assistance programs is necessary to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations. Ministries of Agriculture, alongside other organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), should lead in coordinating and improving food aid delivery. Integrating food assistance with broader development programs will build long-term resilience and reduce aid dependency.

In conclusion, addressing food insecurity in the Horn of Africa requires strengthening climate resilience efforts, promoting conflict resolution, improving economic opportunities, investing in infrastructure development, enhancing regional cooperation, and scaling up food assistance. Implementing the African Union declarations, such as the Maputo and Malabo Declarations, is essential. While some countries such as Kenya have made good progress in this regard, many still fall short of targets, necessitating renewed focus on investments, governance, and agriculture-led development to address food insecurity and drive economic growth.



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