



# Humanitarian Interventions in the Horn of Africa: Successes, Failures and Challenges

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Date of Submission: 27-03-2024

Date of Acceptance: 06-04-2024

## ABSTRACT

Despite the combined efforts of several international organizations devoted to resolving these urgent concerns, the Horn of Africa region continues to face persistent humanitarian crises, ranging from starvation and drought to conflict and displacement. This paper has attempted to conduct a thorough research of the barriers preventing international organizations from conducting effective humanitarian operations in the Horn of Africa. This study has shed light on the intricate complexities that impede effective humanitarian responses through a comprehensive strategy that includes an analysis of the political, social, and economic dynamics within the region as well as an examination of the roles and strategies adopted by key international actors. This research has advanced our understanding of the difficulties faced by international organizations functioning in one of the most vulnerable areas of the globe. To support more successful and long-lasting humanitarian initiatives in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, tackling these issues going forward will require a comprehensive strategy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Long through decades, the horn-shaped, easternmost peninsula of Africa, known as the 'Horn of Africa' or the 'Greater Horn of Africa', has been in a fragile situation and is under humanitarian crisis consistently. The region extends to more than just four countries, like Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, which are also representing in the Horn of Africa Initiative, a coordinated approach taken up for addressing the shared regional challenges. But this paper primarily focuses on the Horn of Africa region in a more geographic sense (the definition varies) which includes Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Kenya, Sudan, and South Sudan too shall be considered while discussing statistics and the crisis, to a certain extent.

The region of the Horn of Africa has witnessed every possible bit of a humanitarian crisis starting from deadly drought to conflicts. There have been a considerable amount of humanitarian interventions in the region but the one thing that is still constant today and decades back is 'insufficient aid and assistance' and 'constant suffering of common people'. Studying the 'whys' and 'wheres' of the failures is important for understanding better steps that can be taken for the people of the Horn of Africa.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology, for examining "Humanitarian Interventions in the Horn of Africa; Successes, Failures and Challenges" takes an approach commencing by reviewing existing literature on the subject. Case studies will be carried out to scrutinize interventions in nations of the Horn of Africa region. Conversations collected by secondary research from associates of various organizations, NGOs, government bodies, and local communities will offer insights into their experiences and viewpoints. Quantitative data analysis will be used to detect trends and patterns while ethnographic research techniques will provide an understanding of the socio background. This research is significant due to the necessity to enhance responses in a region distressed by extreme weather conditions leading to disasters, persistent instability, conflicts, and significant displacement rates. Ethical considerations like maintaining confidentiality in case studies when required, showing sensitivity, preventing harm, and being self-aware, as a researcher will be rigorously observed throughout the study to uphold its integrity and respectfulness.

## BACKGROUND OF THE CRISIS SITUATION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA



Despite regional differences, the hunger for a better tomorrow drives the countries in the Horn of Africa. There is no single crisis circumstance, but a lot of distress altogether, people in the region are facing extreme climate change, famine, clean water shortage, starvation and food insecurity, economic challenges, diseases, displacement, and last but not least, conflicts and tensions too which worsens the lives of the common people.

- **Deadly Drought:** Beginning with the 'worst drought in 40 years', as it has been termed by many recognized press releases, has gripped the region till 2023, scientists associated with the World Meteorological Organisation have said that this was because of the low rainfall and increased evaporation in the region as there is extreme climate change and rise in temperature in the whole world, triggering the population of the region. There have been several failed rainy seasons consecutively, and that has contributed to major food insecurity, having low or no access to safe, clean, and affordable food and water is the main concern that arose from the drought situation. Reports have also stated that more than 13.2 million livestock have died across the region, causing severe economic impact, along with shattered livelihoods.

- **Devastating Floods:** After the deadly drought the rainy season was expected to alleviate the hardships, but the region, especially Somalia has gone through devastating floods, a result of extreme climate change again. The beginning of 2023 has witnessed above-average rainfall, and as of the end of 2023, the UN has termed the condition to be 'once in a century', In support of that, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UN Somalia, George Conway, has also tweeted about more than 100 casualties and 750k displaced people because of the floods. Homes, schools, buildings, and bridges, everything has been washed away, and the common people have been pushed towards famine and diseases. Currently, Djibouti is under heavy rains and floods too.

- **Damage and Displacement:** Floods have caused significant displacement, with more than 14,400 people displaced in Somalia due to flooding. This has caused devastated cropland, with approximately 83,000 hectares of cropland damaged in some areas of Somalia. People have been overthrown of their houses in search of security, food, and stability, the Horn of Africa has seen the worst internal displacement and migration

resulting from the extreme climatic conditions. Moreover, the floods wreaked havoc on homes, agricultural lands, and livestock. Schools and health facilities were shut down as a result. 219,000 people in southern Somalia alone have been displaced as noted by the World Food Programme

- Moreover, talking about the impact on the mental health of people, a preliminary study conducted by the UN, the health ministry, and the national university found that 76% of Somalis have experienced psychological disorders.

- **Disease Outbreaks:** Continued flooding has increased the risk of water-borne diseases, leading to cholera outbreaks in the affected areas. UN reports have indicated persistent cholera transmission and increased cases in drought-affected regions. In addition, measles, and malaria also took their place, with a severe impact on illness and loss of life.

The region has experienced the highest-ever levels of reported disease outbreaks and climate-related health emergencies this century witnessing 39 reported outbreaks, including diseases such as anthrax, measles, cholera, yellow fever, chikungunya, and meningitis, among others. These outbreaks have accounted for more than 80% of the acute public health events reported.

Vaccination coverage in the region for life-saving childhood vaccines, such as measles, has been reported to be below the necessary threshold to prevent disease outbreaks during the crisis period

- **Conflicts and Unrest:** Countries in the region, such as Somalia, South Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea, have experienced prolonged conflicts, civil wars, and political unrest, leading to violence, displacement of populations, and a lack of governance.

The current tension between Somalia and Ethiopia regarding Ethiopia being a landlocked country and dealing with Somaliland for access to the Red Sea, triggering Somalia as it considers Somaliland to be its part, while Somaliland considers itself to be independent. The deal intensifies tensions in the Horn of Africa, with potential implications for regional power dynamics and ongoing disputes. The situation echoes past disputes in the region, raising concerns about the impact on regional stability and relationships, further impacting the movement of humanitarian



aid, and potentially hindering delivery to vulnerable populations. Moreover, it will exacerbate existing refugee and displacement challenges in the region, compromising access to basic services for vulnerable populations.

More than half of the population affected by the current drought live in areas controlled by Al-Shabab, exacerbating the situation. The region faces security threats from terrorist groups and piracy activities along the coastlines. Organizations like Al-Shabaab in Somalia and other extremist groups contribute to instability and pose security risks in the region. Piracy off the coast of Somalia has also been a significant concern for maritime security.

Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia are also strained, with reports of [the International Crisis Group Organisation](#) saying Eritrea critically responded to remarks made by Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed regarding sea access restoration and Eritrean forces have surfaced in Ethiopia's Tigray region, with allegations of abduction of farmers and theft of livestock by Eritrean troops.

Coming to the Sudan, It killed 14,000 people and displaced 8 million till now. The World Food Programme says the power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rebel Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) can become the world's largest hunger crisis, children are close to starvation and are moving from one place to another as refugees in search of better conditions. War crimes have been witnessed by it gender-based violence, killing, harassment, and so on, pushing the common people towards devastated livelihoods and economy, trauma, hunger, and catastrophe.

- **Food Insecurity and Malnourishment:** Food insecurity and hunger have killed and are killing millions from this region, if statistically focused, [The Global Report of Food Crisis 2023](#), [World Food Programme](#) says that in 2022, around 34.5 million people in the Horn of Africa were identified as facing acute food insecurity at crisis. The same report classifies the top most vulnerable countries where Ethiopia, and Sudan made their place with 21%, and 24% of their population affected respectively.

COVID-19 pandemic and high food and fuel prices also led to a significant displacement of people, with the region hosting 4.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, as well as 12.7 as of November 2022, reported by WHO.

All in all, the region is experiencing extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and diseases, leading to the forced displacement of millions of people. The impact of climate change has resulted in the loss of livelihoods, conflicts over natural resources, and migration due to unbearable climatic conditions. Additionally, the region is facing challenges related to internal conflicts, power rivalries, and geopolitical manipulation by external forces. The crisis has led to increased vulnerability, displacement, and a lack of access to basic needs such as food, water, and healthcare.

#### CASE STUDY 1 - Lina's Struggle in the Face of the Climate Crisis

Lina, is a bright-eyed displaced child, from Ethiopia, a region deeply impacted by the constant grip of the climate crisis. Her story mirrors the challenges faced by countless children and families in the Horn of Africa.

She and her family have suffered the painful consequences of the climate crisis, particularly the unforgiving drought. As a consequence, they were forced to leave their home in search of safe water and food, leaving them in a state of instability and uncertainty. The scarcity of resources has made it difficult for Lina's family to afford essential food and supplies, leaving them vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, and other health risks.

Access to education has become a formidable challenge for Lina and children like her in the region. The climate-related disruptions have damaged schools, limited resources, and increased the risk of dropout due to family displacement. These barriers threaten Lina's cognitive development, learning outcomes, and prospects.

Lina's story encapsulates the urgent need for collective support, resilience-building, and access to education for vulnerable children and families. It underscores the impact of the climate crisis on real lives and emphasizes the critical importance of sustained funding and urgent interventions to help these communities recover and have strength in the face of future challenges.

In conclusion, Lina's story serves as a reminder of the human impact of the climate crisis and the critical need for assistance for vulnerable children and families in the Horn of Africa. It's a call for collective action and sustained commitment to support those like Lina in building a brighter, more resilient future.



## CASE STUDY 2 – A helpless father in the refugee camp of the Somali capital, Mogadishu

Mohammed, a displaced lower shabelle resident and a father, and his family have been directly affected by the drought, leading to their displacement and lack of access to necessities, such as food and medical care. The new camp for internally displaced people in Mogadishu might have been their refuge, as it's a common destination for families like Mohammed's who have been forced to leave their homes due to the crisis.

The crises led to disease outbreaks, Mohammed's daughter died of measles and his son was sick, with a lack of food and medical care. They are suffering from malnutrition and diseases and are in urgent need of medical attention. The scarcity of resources has made it challenging for Mohammed to provide adequate care and nourishment for his children.

Though the world leaders were discussing and were involved in decision-making regarding the situation, the father was more concerned about saving his children and providing them with the basic needs that were lacking at that time.

Mohammed and his family's struggle in the face of the Horn of Africa drought crisis highlights the urgent need for humanitarian aid and long-term solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change. This case study serves as a poignant reminder of the human impact of the crisis and the importance of collective efforts to provide support and sustainable solutions for the affected communities in the Horn of Africa.

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND SUCCESS STORIES

The International community has put satisfactory efforts into helping the people and the region in need. There have been actions and aid assistance by various organizations like the United Nations, The European Union, UNICEF, UNHCR, USAID, and so on. Below are some of those success stories that have rescued and helped the countries of the Horn of Africa.

Recently the European Commission reported a project of financial assistance of 171 million euros by the EU in the region of the Greater Horn of Africa supporting Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda, with Djibouti at the highest having 500,000 Euros.

In 2022, UNICEF and its partners successfully provided essential life-saving healthcare services to

more than 2 million children and women in the Horn of Africa. They also offered preventative measures for malnutrition to over 30 million children and mothers, treated nearly 1.3 million children under 5 for severe acute malnutrition, and ensured access to safe water for almost 4.6 million people through borehole renovation, and water system improvements in schools, health centers, and communities. In 2023, UNICEF planned to seek US\$759 million to offer life-saving support to 16.6 million people, including 12.2 million children, in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia—an increase of 39% from 2022. Moreover, UNICEF is integrating remote sensing methods with hydrogeological, meteorological, and geophysical data to create maps indicating the suitability of groundwater in regions susceptible to drought.

Furthermore, we have Africa Climate Summit 2023, which aims to address climate change challenges not only globally but with a particular focus on Africa. The Summit provided a platform for discussing climate solutions, barriers, and opportunities in different regions, which could indirectly include the Horn of Africa.

Coming to the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA), which has documented a UN-backed event that was co-hosted by the United Nations, Italy, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United States, that collaborated with the Governments of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Through this event, donors announced pledges amounting to \$2.4 billion to support nearly 32 million people across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Food, water, health care, nutrition, and protection services were sustained. In the same event, an international commitment was made which was about the US humanitarian assistance which was about to be more than \$1.4 billion in FY 2023.

USAID and various other U.S. government bodies have been significantly engaged in providing substantial financial support to the region. For instance, in FY 2023, USAID/BHA allocated \$1.47 billion for the Horn of Africa response, with further contributions from entities such as the State/PRM, according to fact sheet #12 provided by the USAID government. The U.S. has also provided \$1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance in Somalia since 2006 to address the problems of drought, famine, and refugees. Since 2011, the U.S. has provided an additional \$240 million in development assistance to support economic, political, and social sectors to



achieve greater stability, establish a formal economy, obtain access to basic services, and attain representation through legitimate,

Last but not least, a recent report by the UNHCR states that it has provided life-saving assistance such as nutrition, health, food, WASH, emergency shelter, and core relief items, with almost 1.2 million individuals receiving cash grants totaling \$31 million. Progress was made on solutions, with 25,500 refugees assisted to return to their countries of origin, and 151,300 refugees spontaneously returning to South Sudan, among other achievements.

These are some of the many actions that have been taken to uplift the region from the disastrous humanitarian crises, but the people of the Horn of Africa are still submerging and are in urgent need of assistance from the global community. There have been challenges and failures that the global community goes through which needs to be addressed for effective and all-inclusive solutions.

#### FAILURES AND CHALLENGES IN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

A recent report by UNICEF says that thirteen emergencies should be given special attention as of 2024, which include Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, Somalia is facing a once-in-a-century drought, flooding caused by El Niño, ongoing conflict, and inflated food prices, leaving millions of children in need of assistance. UNICEF is providing life-saving assistance but needs more. In Ethiopia, overlapping hazards such as conflict, severe drought, flooding, inter-communal violence, and disease outbreaks have left more than 30 million people, over half of whom are children, in need of humanitarian assistance. These crises underscore the critical need for special attention and support in the region.

Going a year back, according to reports, 36.4 million people were suffering in the region and 21.7 million people needed food assistance. In multiple crises, even today the circumstance stands the same, undoubtedly in different statistics but if not worse, nothing is even better..

- Food Insecurity and Starvation still at its heights: The humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa has led to substantial needs for food assistance, with needs in more than one country being unfulfilled. The economic cost of livestock loss, substantial food insecurity, and other related

issues have had a significant impact on the region's economy, posing challenges for recovery and resilience-building efforts. The World Food Programme urges a requirement of US\$810 million to respond to the crisis and famine.

- No sufficient funds: Women and Children are vulnerable to malnutrition and death. Thirst and Hunger drive the vulnerable groups to migrate from one place to another in search of security and food. Additionally, ongoing conflicts in the region have exacerbated the circumstances in the area and have been identified as major drivers of displacement in the Horn of Africa. Around 13 million people are suffering a hunger crisis every day in the region, says the UN.

Sudan, leading to the world's largest hunger crisis needed food assistance at a larger level and it has been lacking due to a lack of funds which has been asked for, from the international community, as reported by an associate of the World Food Programme named CINDY McCAIN has said in one of her interviews, urging the world community to step up and look into what is going on in the region. "*PEACE*", "*ACCESS*" and "*FUNDING*", *that's what we need. period..*", as she said.

- Migration, Displacement, and the Refugee Crisis: Migration in the Horn of Africa has become the key coping strategy. A Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023 launched by The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre highlighted the condition of Somalia which is still worse. Documentaries and press releases have shed light on the struggles of the commoners which range from lack of sanitation to lack of food and clean water. People are struggling with movement and livelihood, and blockage of transport is contributing to a lack of resources. Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia are home to the largest numbers of refugees in Africa, with displaced populations relying significantly on external aid for their survival.

- Inadequate Response to Climate Extremes: The region's vulnerability to climate extremes like droughts and floods has been exacerbated by the limited capacity of international organizations to respond effectively. The failure to implement long-term climate adaptation solutions and build resilience in the face of recurring crises has left communities in the Horn of Africa exposed to repeated cycles of food insecurity and displacement



The Somali Peninsula has recorded the driest conditions since 1981, the worst flooding, and unmanageable conflict, all at once. Daud Aweis, Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism, said in Somalia, “*So far the government has provided little support to the people, we are trying to mobilize more resources and support to the affected people, the main problem is the accessibility, in some areas, bridges are being collapsed and in some areas, the airports are also damaged and destroyed by the floods .....*”

Despite humanitarian interventions, the region continues to struggle due to the complex interplay of climate change, water stress, drought, conflict, and poverty. The need for ongoing support and long-term adaptation funds remains critical to address the persistent humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa

### III. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The Horn of Africa is highly vulnerable to climate change, facing frequent droughts, floods, and conflicts. These disasters worsen humanitarian needs, such as food shortages, malnutrition, and displacement. Despite international aid, there are still major gaps in meeting these needs due to limited infrastructure and difficulty reaching affected areas. The refugee crisis puts additional strain on resources. Continuous outside aid is vital. The World Food Programme has requested \$810 million to address the immediate crisis, but long-term solutions are also crucial for increasing resilience and addressing underlying causes.

Households have no food, children suffer from malnutrition, and people are dying from starvation every day. Families unable to afford necessities, worsening malnutrition, and child labor. Millions of people are on the brink of famine, and 300,000 are already living in famine conditions. Aid efforts are slow and insufficient, with the situation demanding urgent and more comprehensive support. The need for increased aid and intervention is critical to prevent a catastrophic outcome.

To my understanding, to tackle the intricate issues in the Horn of Africa, it's crucial to combine humanitarian aid and assistance, development programs, and peacebuilding initiatives. Coordinated, long-term, and adequately funded interventions are essential to ease the

suffering of common people and foster stability in the region as much as possible. The importance of ‘everybody’ over ‘a certain no. of lives’ must be understood. Every life is precious and assistance should reach each and every one

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