

ETHIOPIA

Extreme conditions, extreme measures

Ethiopia suffered one of its worst meteorological droughts for 50 years in 2015, following the failure of two consecutive rainy seasons.¹⁶⁹ More than 80 per cent of the country's agricultural yield and the employment of 85 per cent of the workforce depend on adequate rainfall.¹⁷⁰ The drought contributed to the lowest soil moisture levels in at least 30 years, crop failure, below-average vegetation cover and severe water shortages in pastoral and arable farming areas.

Devastated livelihoods and high inflation have combined to increase food insecurity and malnutrition rates, particularly in central and eastern areas, forcing many people to leave their homes in search of food, water or work.

Recurrent and severe drought has also contributed to competition and clashes between communities under highly stressed conditions over access to scarce water and pasture.¹⁷¹ Communal land tenure systems grant pastoralists equal rights to exploit resources, but in practice the use of grazing areas is regulated between and within tribes. When drought pushes a tribe to migrate into another's area, tensions between pastoralists or between pastoralists and settled farmers can arise.¹⁷²

Drought and other climate-related hazards do not act alone in driving disaster and displacement risk. Their impacts are determined in large part by structural issues that drive vulnerability and exposure such as poverty, demographic trends, weak institutions and environmental degradation. Despite rapid economic growth, the reduction of extreme poverty, slowing population growth and improved social safety nets over the past decade, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁷³

Its population is still set to double in less than 30 years, putting further pressure on livelihoods and natural resources through deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification and poor farm management practices. Development is unevenly distributed, leaving vulnerable people and emerging regions disadvantaged and at higher risk of displacement.¹⁷⁴

Climate trends across decades and extreme variability in rainfall from season to season play an important role in aggravating the drivers of disaster and displacement risk. Food insecurity is verging on chronic as farming areas that receive sufficient rain have shrunk over the past 20 years.¹⁷⁵ Most food is consumed by the families who produce it.¹⁷⁶

The livelihoods of around seven million pastoralists have been jeopardised by the cumulative impacts of more frequent drought on livestock losses, rising cereal prices and lower returns when they sell or trade their animals.¹⁷⁷ Natural cycles such as El Niño will continue to contribute to extreme precipitation patterns, and most global climate models project an increase in the occurrence of both drought and floods in Ethiopia over the coming decades.¹⁷⁸

Displacement in 2015 and early 2016

Drought contributed to the internal displacement of more than 280,000 people between August 2015 and February 2016, according to IOM. The figure includes at least 147,996 people displaced by severe food insecurity in the drought-affected and predominantly pastoralist regions of Afar and Somali.

The government and its humanitarian partners have also noted displacement caused by communal conflict in these areas, related to the effects of drought on competition for pasture and water.¹⁷⁹ The overall figure also includes around 67,800 people displaced by communal conflict associated with the drought in Oromia and Somali over the same period.¹⁸⁰

The figures do not, however, capture displacement associated with drought among all affected populations, such as those in the East and West Hararge districts, because data collection is limited to specific areas by the resources available.¹⁸¹ Further tracking of household mobility strategies, such as men migrating without their

families in search of work, in some cases possibly crossing borders, would be of great benefit. It would help to inform immediate and long-term protection and assistance interventions to save lives, reduce morbidity, protect and restore pastoralist and arable livelihoods, and prepare for and reduce the impact of further shocks and displacement.¹⁸²

As of mid-December 2015, around 72,700 people categorised as “drought displaced” were staying in makeshift shelters at 24 sites in the Siti area of northern Somali.¹⁸³ Most of the sites were spontaneous collective settlements or centres, generally organised along ethnic or family lines, and a third were scattered individual shelters. Most of the IDPs were from pastoralist communities in Siti who had remained in the area while moving between districts and villages, often with their remaining livestock.¹⁸⁴

The main reason given at all sites for not being able to return home was lack of food, and most if not all IDPs also said they had lost livestock. Reasons not captured are likely to include lack of access to water points, grazing land, veterinary services, livestock markets, cash and credit.¹⁸⁵ IDPs at all sites bar one had been displaced for the first time, which further emphasises the severity of the situation in 2015.¹⁸⁶

Eighty-five per cent of the IDPs had characteristics that added to their assistance and protection needs. The disaggregated data reveals that 72 per cent were under the age of 18, including around 16,000 infants under the age of four. It also showed nearly 200 people suffering from chronic disease or serious medical conditions, and nearly 300 with physical or mental disabilities. There were more than 3,200 people aged 60 or over, nearly 2,500 pregnant or breast-feeding women and nearly 1,000 households headed by one person, most often a woman.¹⁸⁷

In the severely drought-affected regions of Afar, Somali and Oromia, as of the end of the year there were a variety of groups of IDPs displaced at different times and for various reasons. In the Kilibati area of Afar, more than 14,500 people fleeing “drought” joined 5,700 people displaced by the effects of a volcanic eruption in Eritrea, of whom 1,800 had been living in displacement since 2010.¹⁸⁸ In Siti, around 71,200 people “displaced by drought” joined more than 5,600 people displaced by communal conflict a month earlier, and another 7,600 displaced by communal conflict up to two and a half years earlier.¹⁸⁹

The most acute effects of the 2015 drought continue to be felt, with the potential for hundreds of thousands more people to become displaced in 2016 if early and adequate humanitarian assistance is not mobilised.¹⁹⁰ Between 50 and 90 per cent of crops and livestock have been lost in some areas.¹⁹¹

The government and its humanitarian partners have also highlighted the vital importance of ensuring access to safe drinking water, without which the potential for large-scale displacements of whole communities would be high.¹⁹² Other likely impacts of displacement on pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in remote areas include the disruption of their children’s education, psycho-social and mental health issues, and less access to health and nutrition services.¹⁹³

The 2016 humanitarian funding appeal for \$1.4 billion, including food aid for 10.2 million people, was only 37 per cent met as of the end of January.¹⁹⁴ The government is prioritising vulnerable segments of the population including people displaced by the effects of drought and woman and child-headed households.¹⁹⁵ Better data collection and monitoring of displacement and the needs of people affected by drought would go a long way to ensuring that the government and its operational partners and donors have the information to make this a reality.

Both humanitarian and development organisations also need to make concerted efforts to facilitate longer-term recovery and development solutions. The coordinator of the UN’s response in Ethiopia has said the government’s leadership and integration of the humanitarian response into its national development systems provides a good basis for the long-term efforts needed to strengthen people’s resilience to future shocks.¹⁹⁶

Without a sustained focus, however, on improving livelihood security for people already displaced and those who may become so, the risk of the current crisis becoming prolonged and repeated is likely to increase.