

Between Drought and Flood

Somalia's Hunger Crisis and the Next Shock

As Somalia enters the second half of 2026, millions of people face acute hunger, humanitarian funding remains critically inadequate, while forecasts point to severe flooding later this year. Breaking this cycle of crisis requires scaled-up emergency response and resilience investment.

Background

Six million people in Somalia are facing crisis levels of hunger or worse.ⁱ More than **700,000 people have been displaced** in 2026 so far including over **500,000 people** forced by drought alone.ⁱⁱ Humanitarian agencies are warning of malnutrition rates higher than anything seen in the last five years.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite the scale of needs, the **humanitarian response in Somalia is lacking 80 per cent** of requested funding leaving humanitarian actors unable to respond at the scale required.^{iv}

A Drought Driven Hunger Crisis

Somalia depends on two rainy seasons per year, the *Deyr* (October – December) and *Gu* (April – June), to replenish water sources, sustain livestock, and support crop production. These are interspersed with two dry seasons, the *Jilaal* (January – March) and *Hagaa* (July – September). There are two main harvests each year at the end of the *Deyr* and end of the *Gu* rainy seasons.

The failure of the 2025 *Deyr* rains led to widespread water scarcity and decimated agricultural production. In southern Somalia, cereal production was the lowest recorded in three decades.^v



Dry pastures and limited water led to significant livestock losses as animals either died from hunger or were sold by households trying to survive. Water sources dried up, with 280 boreholes becoming non-functional during 2026.^{vi} The corresponding impact on rural livelihoods also triggered large-scale displacement, with over **half a million people displaced by drought**.

The *Gu* rainy season in April 2026 provided some relief but was below average and unevenly distributed. While rainfall improved conditions in some areas, many parts of Somalia remained trapped in prolonged drought conditions. Recent predictions warn that there may be a 50 per cent deficit in cereal production by next harvest.^{vii} With the El Niño climate phenomenon confirmed for 2026, Somalia also faces a risk of severe flooding, which will have a devastating impact on displaced communities.

Surviving in Displacement

As drought forces families from their homes, thousands have sought safety in informal settlements on the outskirts of Somalia's towns and cities. People report travelling for days on foot to arrive in these sites. Over 12,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settlements exist in Somalia, with new sites continually forming.^{viii} Following sharp reductions in humanitarian funding in 2025, many of these sites have little or no humanitarian presence. Families have been left alone to build makeshift shelters and struggle to afford food, water, healthcare, and other necessities. In Baidoa alone, more than 600,000 IDPs live in informal settlements, many with little or no humanitarian assistance.

"My greatest challenge is that I have no milk in my breasts for the baby. All I can do is to give the baby water with a little sugar."



Nuriya Abdi, a 26-year-old mother with three children living in Wayamo IDP settlement. She had been displaced by years of drought in the Bakool region. **"I decided instead of dying there, I would try to find help in a city like Baidoa."**

She was pregnant during the journey and gave birth in her self-made shelter because she could not afford the trip to a hospital. In this portrait, her baby is 4 days old. She had nothing to feed the baby.

There are no humanitarian agencies in the IDP camp. People are trying to survive completely on their own.



The Hidden Protection Crisis

With funding cuts, **75 per cent** of protection services have closed, primarily frontline community desks. Protection risks are escalating: by the end of June 2026, humanitarian actors had already recorded almost as many protection incidents as were reported during the whole of 2025 ([PSMN](#)).

A family displaced by drought in Baidoa.

For many displaced families, the search for food and income has become inseparable from protection risks, particularly for women and girls. Where women try to earn income, such as by collecting firewood or seeking casual labour, they report facing harassment, assault, and sexual violence. In displacement sites in Baidoa and Kismayo, women estimate there are up to **5 incidents of rape or gender-based violence each week**. Protection risks do not end outside the home. Reports indicate that domestic violence is increasing amid worsening economic conditions and prolonged displacement.

Families are forced to make impossible choices between meeting basic needs or staying safe. In an IDP settlement in Kismayo, women reported that children left at home were subjected to rape and other forms of abuse while their mothers searched for food or income.

Cycles of Crisis

For many Somali households, the hunger crisis this year is not the result of one drought but the cumulative toll of years of climate shocks and stress. Displaced Somalis describe experiencing up to **four seasons of drought over the past two years** before they made the choice to seek aid.

“I spent 19 years building my herd. The last of them died five months ago.”



“This drought killed the livestock unlike other droughts.” The animals died from a combination of thirst, disease, and hunger. In previous droughts, rains eventually returned, allowing families to recover.

Abdiwahab Hassan Jibril is a 49-year-old man from Jilib, a farming town in middle Juba, Kismayo. He came to New Qaamqaam IDP settlement after drought forced him to abandon his farm. While cycles of drought are not unusual in Jilib, the last two years had almost no rain, and the failed 2025 rainy season was the final blow. **“This time, there was no relief.”**

“They bring sacks to us during the harvest and tell us, ‘We take half, you take half.’”

A IDP described fleeing his farm in Middle Juba after drought and conflict made it impossible to survive. His family has survived many previous droughts, sometimes surviving by digging for roots to eat. But even this wasn't enough when an armed group demanded a share of the harvest.

Droughts occur amid a broader context of insecurity and conflict. In many parts of Somalia, conflict and the presence of non-state armed groups restrict movement, limit access to services, and can undermine livelihoods. Households report facing illegal taxation and extortion by non-state armed groups during periods of drought, often cited as the final push towards displacement.

Climate shocks are becoming increasingly frequent in Somalia. Since 1990, the country has experienced more than 30 major climate shocks, including droughts and floods, a threefold increase compared to the previous two decades.^{ix} Rather than isolated emergencies, these shocks are becoming a recurring feature of life for many Somali communities, leaving households with less time to recover between crises.

Somalia's recurring crises demonstrate the limits of emergency assistance alone. Without investments that help families restore livelihoods, protect and regenerate land and water resources, and reduce the impact of climate shocks, humanitarian needs will continue to return season after season.

Investments in resilience address basic humanitarian needs while also helping communities stabilise food security, protect livelihoods, manage climate risks, and better withstand future droughts and floods. When delivered at scale across a camp, community, or broader landscape, these investments can also mitigate the shocks themselves, materially changing the localised severity or frequency of droughts and floods. In Somalia, an emphasis on nature-based solutions such as ecosystem restoration, water harvesting, and household permagardens have helped communities restore degraded land and strengthen food security.

A woman wearing a blue hijab and a colorful headband is watering plants in a permagarden. She is holding a blue watering can and spraying water onto the foliage. The background shows a clear blue sky and more green plants.

“We no longer buy vegetables, we grow them, eat what we need, and sell the rest.” Jawahir Hassan, a displaced mother in Baidoa in her permagarden.



Resilience in Somalia

It can be challenging to find optimism in the face of climate change and the escalating frequency and severity of shocks in Somalia. However, through the *Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS)*, communities are proving that more can and should be done to reverse these trends through locally-led climate adaptation and resilience programming.

Read more about how to enable

[Nature as First Responder](#)

When sustained over time, these investments enable communities to better withstand future shocks and reduce humanitarian needs. This is why **resilience is an urgent priority in Somalia**.

Conditions Set to Worsen

As of July, Somalia has entered its second dry season of the year, the *Haaga*, with above-average temperatures expected until September and little opportunity for drought-affected households to recover.

Food prices have also come under pressure from shipping disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Somalia relies on imports for around 90 per cent of its fuel and much of its food supply, and fuel prices have risen by up to 150 per cent, driving up transport costs, which increases the price of food.^x

Many of the most vulnerable communities are in southern Somalia. Burhakhaba, in the Bay region, has over 100,000 people at crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of hunger according to the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* (IPC). In rural areas in Burhakhaba there are people at risk of famine conditions.^{xi}

Conditions are also deteriorating beyond the hotspots. Many of the areas identified with crisis levels of hunger, IPC Phase 3, will worsen throughout this dry period. Areas in Central and North Somalia also are facing difficult drought conditions, and displacement patterns are signalling that communities are failing to cope with the strain. In late June, **21,000 people were displaced by drought** across Galkayo District in only **4 days**. Approximately 3,500 households fled their homes because they had no more water and their livestock had largely died.^{xii}

"Seeing your children crying because of hunger is painful. We have never seen such hunger in our entire life."

Hawa is a mother displaced from Galoley village. She and her children fled their family farm after the crops failed in the drought. She walked for two days to make the 25 km journey to Burhakhaba. They are now in an IDP camp with 150 other families with no humanitarian response.

"I lost hope. I asked people in the camp if there is a reporting channel to speak about the hunger and famine we are facing. There is nothing. No guidance or support."

The Next Six Months

While Somalia continues to grapple with the impacts of drought, many communities are bracing for the next emergency. By the fall, El Niño conditions will see flooding across Somalia resulting above-average rainfall during the *Deyr* rainy season.

With Somalia's prolonged drought and severe environmental degradation in many areas, the soil is less able to absorb heavy rainfall, increasing the risk of flash floods and riverine flooding compared to other years where the land can better retain water and regulate flooding.

Forecasts suggest that the 2026 El Niño may be similar to the devastating floods in 2023 – which were described as a once-in-a-century event for Somalia – and displaced 1.2 million people, killed 8,000 animals, and damaged 11,000 hectares of farmland.^{xiii}

People living in displacement settlements are among the most vulnerable to flooding, with limited shelter, resources, and support to prepare or withstand climate shocks. Many displacement sites are located on ecologically marginalised, flood-prone land, leaving displaced communities with less natural protection against climate shocks.

Flooding in the fall will also further hurt agricultural production and exacerbate food insecurity by preventing planting, damaging existing crops, destroying and infrastructure. In worst-case scenarios, a combination of crop failure, livestock losses, displacement, and livelihood disruptions will cause more hunger hotspots or worsen risks of IPC conditions in communities by early 2027.

An example of how severe flooding can be for communities. Flooding in Jowhar, Somalia in 2021.



Preparing Before Floods

Preparedness measures now will help reduce the impacts of El Niño flooding by helping communities protect lives, livelihoods, and essential infrastructure. Low lying riverine communities will need to evacuate and could face displacement for months. The challenge now is to ensure that their temporary relocation is safe, planned, and that it protects communities' resilience gains since the last large scale flooding events in 2023.

Working with communities to plan and act now can safeguard infrastructure and prepare people by identifying emergency evacuation routes, establishing what can be moved and what should be secured before floods, and discussing how to adapt critical seasonal farming plans to expected flooding.

Preparations should be community focused, community-led, and where feasible community delivered. **Communities are always the first responders during flood emergencies.** Supporting community-led preparedness will substantially reduce loss and accelerate recovery when flooding occurs.

Breaking Cycles of Crisis

Somalia is not facing a single emergency, but a cycle of climate shocks that drives displacement, hunger, protection risks, and recurring humanitarian needs as the next shock builds. Without urgent funding for both lifesaving assistance and resilience, hundreds of thousands of Somalis will remain trapped in a recurring cycle of crisis.

NRC recommendations:

- **Scale up funding and an integrated humanitarian response, including approaches that enable resilience, in areas facing severe food insecurity and displacement.** Prioritise actions that combine food security, nutrition, WASH, shelter, and protection services while integrating a resilience lens and remembering the role of nature as a first responder to climate crises.
- **Utilise cash as the most effective method to support vulnerable families and communities in emergencies.** Flexible cash, delivered through Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) or Group Cash Transfers, is a fast and effective method to support households to purchase their own food, water, healthcare, and other needs while supporting local markets. A cash response also allows families dependent on agriculture and rural livelihoods to make their own choices to safeguard productive assets before they are forced to sell livestock or leave their homes. Group Cash Transfers enable community groups as a whole to act as trusted responders in planning anticipatory actions and delivering timely responses to emergencies.



Drought conditions in rural Galkayo, Somalia, 2026.

- **Ensure there is emergency preparedness and support for flooding to help communications prepare, mitigate, and survive the risk of flooding during El Niño.** This can include strengthening critical infrastructure and supporting flood mitigation measures in high-risk areas. It should also include supporting communities to develop emergency preparedness, and evacuation plans as well as strategies to protect their assets, livestock, and productive resources from damage during flooding.
- **Increase funding for frontline protection services, with targeted support for women and children in displacement sites.** Scale up community-based protection measures, including lighting, safe access to services, risk mitigation, and protection monitoring in displacement sites. Prioritise targeted services for women, girls, minority groups, children, and female-headed households.
- **Layer resilience and drought recovery programming to break the cycle,** helping communities in drought- and flood-prone areas restore degraded farmland, build water systems that protect against flooding, and expand livelihood options that will reduce humanitarian needs in the long term.

ⁱ IPC, 2026, "[Somalia: Acute Food Insecurity Projection Update April - June 2026](#)," 14 May 2026.

ⁱⁱ UNHCR and NRC, 2026, [Somalia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network](#), "Dashboard – Internally Displaced Individuals and Displacement Reason," accessed 9 July 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱ ICRC, 2026, [Somalia's Child Malnutrition Nears Five-Year Highs](#), 6 May 2026.

^{iv} OCHA, 2026, [Somalia Country snapshot for 2026](#), *Financial Tracking Services*, accessed 9 July 2026.

^v OCHA, 2026, [Somalia: 2025-2026 Drought Emergency - Situation Report No. 5](#), 8 April 2026.

^{vi} *Ibid*

^{vii} FEWS, 2026, [Somalia Food Security Outlook June 2026 - January 2027: Multiple areas across the south face a risk of Famine \(IPC Phase 5\) if flooding is extreme](#), June 2026 - January 2027, 25 June 2026.

^{viii} OCHA, 2026, [Somalia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026](#), 25.

^{ix} Somalia Federal Government and World Bank, 2024, [Somalia Preparedness Plan for Food and Nutrition Security Crises](#).

OCHA, 2022, [Briefing by UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia Adam Abdelmoula](#).

^x OCHA, 2026, [Somalia: 2025-2026 Drought Emergency - Situation Report No. 5](#), 8 April 2026.

^{xi} IPC, 2026, "[Somalia: Acute Food Insecurity Projection Update April - June 2026](#)," 14 May 2026.

^{xii} UNHCR and NRC, 2026, "[Drought-Induced Displacement in Gaalkacyo District, Mudug Region, Protection and Solutions Monitoring](#)," Flash Alert 18, 22 June 2026.

^{xiii} FEWS, 2026, [Somalia Food Security Outlook June 2026 - January 2027: Multiple areas across the south face a risk of Famine \(IPC Phase 5\) if flooding is extreme](#), June 2026 - January 2027, 25 June 2026.

Contact: Mohamed Abdi, NRC Country Director, mohamed.abdi@nrc.no