

HORN OF AFRICA

Multi-causal displacement in the context of drought

A third consecutive year of drought across the Horn of Africa in 2016 compounded the fragility of countries and communities in the region by precipitating crop failure, livestock deaths, rising food insecurity and malnutrition. Community coping capacities were pushed to new limits as household resources and support networks already under stress were further eroded and the movement of displaced populations increasingly reported within and out of areas affected by drought.¹²²

While the drivers of displacement in these contexts are clearly multiple and complex, the UNHCR-led Protection Monitoring and Reporting Network and IOM use a simple “drought” or “drought-related” category for the purpose of recording displacement data. This short-hand appears to be used to refer to people whose proximate reasons for leaving their homes are related to severe food and livelihood insecurity linked to pasture, water and food shortages, as opposed to those labelled as being displaced by conflict or violence, even where conflict may be an underlying or contributing factor. Some reports include “lack of livelihood” as an additional cause of displacement in Somalia as a whole.¹²³ At the same time, displacement in the Bay region of Somalia in 2016 has been ascribed to “drought coupled with heavy ‘taxation’” by the non-state armed group al-Shabaab.¹²⁴

In slow-onset disasters and gradually evolving crises, the difference between forced displacement and voluntary migration can be difficult to distinguish.¹²⁵ In this case, however, extreme conditions and severe food insecurity in the home areas of thousands of people on the move, their dependence on external life-saving assistance and levels of distress and vulnerability reported in 2016 and early 2017 all strongly suggest displacement to be the more appropriate term.¹²⁶ Around 12.8 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda as of the beginning of 2017.

In Somalia, against a backdrop of weak governance, protracted insecurity and chronic poverty similar to the pre-famine situation in 2010 and 2011, severe and persistent drought condi-

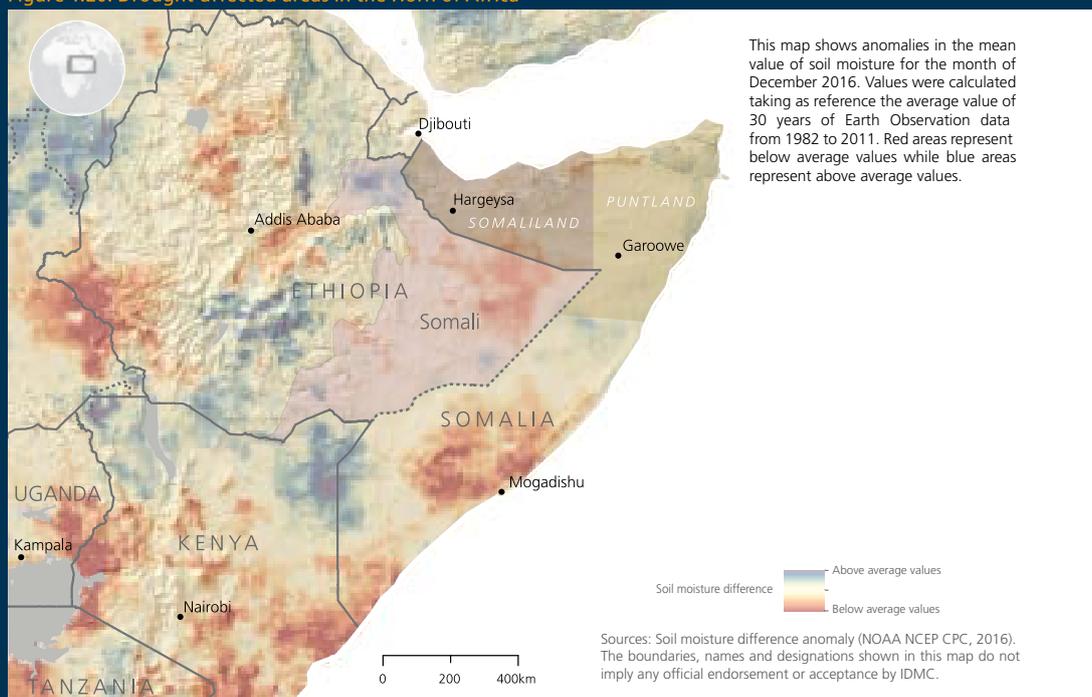
tions have taken a heavy toll.¹²⁷ In October and November, the federal government and the authorities in Jubaland, Puntland and Somaliland appealed to all Somalis and the international community for support. In February 2017, the UN issued a warning of potential famine.¹²⁸ As the humanitarian situation deteriorated toward the end of 2016, particularly in northern regions, many thousands of families dependent on diminishing livestock and agriculture for survival were forced to abandon their homes and usual migratory patterns in search of food, water and work.

The border area between the Somali region of Ethiopia and the autonomous region of Somaliland in Somalia, known as the Hawd, is a traditional rainy season pasture area. In “normal” dry periods, pastoralists move their livestock to areas where rain has fallen, including across the porous border, as part of their usual migration patterns. In 2016, however, nowhere received enough rain and cross-border movements took place in both directions. As both areas were suffering severe drought conditions, the search for pasture or water was often unsuccessful.¹²⁹

During the first half of 2016, some pastoralists from the Somali region, where around 1.5 million people were in need of food assistance, were displaced beyond their homelands to the coast of Somaliland in search of adequate pasture. The pasture was not enough for those who made the journey, however, and they and their depleted herds of weakened livestock were left with two options – to make the long and arduous trek back or remain displaced where they were.¹³⁰

Later in the year, following poor rains during the Deyr wet season from September to November, further drought on the Somalia side of the border drove tens of thousands of pastoralists towards the Hawd. As pastures were rapidly depleted, those with herds still in good enough condition moved further south into Ethiopia. More than 3,770 displaced Somalis crossed the border and arrived in Melkadida in the first two months of 2017.¹³¹ Internal displacement associated with the drought was reported in Somalia and Ethiopia on a much larger scale in 2016 and early 2017, but if famine is not avoided both internal and

Figure 1.20: Drought-affected areas in the Horn of Africa



cross-border movements are likely to become far more significant, as happened during the 2011 famine.¹³²

The short-term cross-border displacement of pastoralists from Somaliland and from the Somali region of Ethiopia into the small neighbouring state of Djibouti was also recorded. Djibouti is an important transit point for migrants and displaced people heading for the Gulf states and beyond, and a relatively stable hub where international assistance can be accessed.¹³³ Thousands of pastoralists were displaced there between January and April 2016, at which point 9,650 people were sheltering among local communities in the Ali-Sabieh, Dickhil and Obock regions.¹³⁴

Many pregnant women and children under five among them showed signs of acute malnutrition and anaemia, and half of the adults were underweight and weakened by tuberculosis and other illnesses.¹³⁵ With almost a quarter of Djibouti's population living in extreme poverty, the acute needs of the new arrivals stretched local services and the scarce resources of their hosts.¹³⁶ A month later most had returned to their countries of origin.¹³⁷

Given that for many people in the Horn of Africa mobility within and across borders is central to their livelihoods, culture and normal adaptive behaviour, those no longer able or allowed to range further afield in search of pasture or assistance should be of equal or even greater concern.

Hundreds of pastoralist families in the severely drought-affected Sanaag region of eastern Somaliland were left behind without the money or means to move away and little left to live on in 2016.¹³⁸ Along the Kenya-Somalia border, the free movement of pastoralists and their livestock between available pasture in traditional grazing lands was restricted by the building of walls and trenches by militant groups, while the potential for conflict over scarce water and pasture has increased.¹³⁹

The cross-border movement of pastoralists may generally be permitted in other border areas, but it is largely unprotected by law. Nor does the human right to freedom of movement protect cross-border mobility, and the definition of a "migrant worker" in the International Covenant on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families is not adapted to the traditional livelihood mobility of pastoralists. Article 2(1) describes a migrant worker as a "person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national."¹⁴⁰

The African Union and a number of regional economic communities (RECs) have recognised the need to support pastoralists' mobility.¹⁴¹ With a forecast of precipitation below average for the rainy season from March to May 2017, their free movement across borders will be vital to their ability to survive the current crisis, recover their losses and build their resilience to future disaster and displacement risk.¹⁴²