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### **Addressing Food Insecurity and Climate Change for Poverty Reduction in the Horn of Africa<sup>1</sup>**

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This article provides an assessment of the impact of food insecurity and climate change on poverty reduction in the Horn of Africa (HoA), which is one of the most affected regions in the world by these interlinked challenges. The region is confronted by these interconnected and mutually reinforcing negative conditions, which are compounded by institutional constraints, insecurity and scarce financial resources. Consequently, to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty in all its forms by 2030, it is imperative to implement urgent and radical transformation of food production systems, and to adopt accelerated and scaled up global actions to strengthen resilience and people's livelihoods in response to climate variability and extremes.

#### **1. Background**

Faced with recurrent droughts and other natural disasters, ecological degradation, and widespread social and economic hardships, the Horn of Africa (HoA) countries formed in 1986<sup>2</sup> the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). A decade later, realizing that the emerging socio-economic challenges of the region required wider cooperation, the countries transformed the IGADD in 1996 to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with its mandate expanded to include “*three priority areas of food security and environmental protection, economic cooperation, regional integration and social development, and peace and security.*”<sup>3</sup>

Faced with prevalent poverty and economic hardships, the issues of food insecurity, climate change and environmental degradation have been key concerns for the countries of the HoA for many decades. The region is confronted by a wide range of these interconnected and mutually reinforcing negative conditions, which are compounded by institutional constraints, insecurity and scarce financial resources. In addition, a high degree of vulnerability to systemic shocks undermines efforts to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition. In this context, there is

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<sup>1</sup> The Horn of Africa (HoA) and also member countries of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

<sup>2</sup> Following successive droughts that hit the region in the 1970s, the countries of the region formed an intergovernmental body to coordinate and support efforts to combat the effects of drought and other natural disasters to build up capabilities to mitigate the effects of future droughts and promote sustained economic and social development.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://igad.int/about-us/what-we-do>.

an urgent need for radical transformation of food production into more sustainable and nutritious systems.

Climate Change has emerged as one of the most critical development challenges in the HOA region, as it has a disproportionate impact on poor communities and households. It has already impacted sufficiency and food security, making the challenge of ending hunger and malnutrition even more difficult. Understanding food security and vulnerability to climate change is not only key to addressing climate change impact, but also to framing ways to adapt to climate risks and reduce vulnerability.

While there have been measurable increases in some crop yields, leading to expansion in food supply in some countries in the region, agricultural productivity in the HoA has not changed to significantly impact food production sustainability. As a result, the overall food supply in the region has remained low and below the minimum food requirements, leading to prevalence of undernourishment and food insecurity.

Climate change is one of the driving forces of food insecurity in the region. It primarily affects production in the agricultural sector, especially crop and livestock production. Beyond production losses, medium- and large-scale disasters can lead to significant impacts across the food value chain, with negative consequences on sector growth, food and non-food agro-industries, and ultimately on poverty reduction in the regional economies.

Hence, the accumulated costs of climate change on agriculture could be much more significant than the immediate production losses. A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that after each medium- and large-scale disaster there is an average loss of 2.6 percent of national agriculture value-added growth, with a much more significant impact likely at subnational levels.

As of 2019, close to 70 million people suffered from hunger in the HoA, corresponding to about one in every three people in the region, compared to the global level that has been at a level slightly below 11 percent<sup>4</sup>. Since 2020, the number of people facing acute hunger and endemic poverty has increased significantly on account of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on the health systems and economies of the sub region, indicating the immense challenge posed to achieve the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

Achieving a resilient society that adapts to changing environmental conditions is an important part of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and poverty reduction across wide segments of the population. It is critical to take a long-term perspective on how to reduce vulnerability and to increase drought-resilient human and socioeconomic development efforts among the HoA's poorest communities. Designing effective interventions is a matter of building the resilience of people and requires sustainable poverty reduction.

In the recent past, interventions made in the region to build a resilient livelihood system were highly fragmented and small in coverage and impact. The approach lacked a systemic view where interventions can be coordinated and lessons learned possibly mainstreamed to existing development programs. Consequently, critical policy formulations to enhance adaptation to climate change and to *build resilience* including risk management, social protection, market stabilization and livelihood diversification, were not effectively implemented.

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<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019: Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns*. (Rome, FAO, 2019).

In view of the expected increase in the magnitude of adverse climate change impact, robust adaptation in the countries of the HoA will require strong institutions, cooperation and harmonization of activities of concerned institutions and support from concerned development partners, considering the insufficient resources available for adequate responses by the governments and the intertwined complexity of reducing poverty. Accordingly, national adaptation planning should strengthen institutions critical to helping countries adapt to climate change. In particular, two critical institutional challenges that should be tackled are: (i) lack of coordination for policy implementation and weak linkages among the different actors and stakeholders; and (ii) limited technical capacity at all levels including governments and other actors, as reflected in the lack of long-term planning in climate change adaptation and mitigation, which is a major constraint on policy implementation at the local level.

Food insecurity challenges in the HoA thus call for establishment of the Integrated Climate-Response System to build resilience. Such integrated resilience building will help boost overall risk-management capacity by reducing fragmentation of programs and institutions, and link with early warning and emergency systems. It aims additionally to foster participatory planning and social accountability, and paves the way for countries in the region to collaborate on joint actions and investments on resilience building measures that benefit communities in similar eco-systems across borders.

## **2. Regional response to climate change and food insecurity**

The HoA countries' responses to climate change and food insecurity disasters, thus far, have been largely reactive and firefighting. Most of the efforts have centered on emergency response, as the region is characterized by limited capacity for sustainable disaster management and insufficient financial resources. Consequently, previous efforts at reformulation of the HoA countries' response to climate change impacts did little to reduce food insecurity in the region for many reasons; mainly they were initiated from the top with little appreciation of the constraints, needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries, and perhaps most importantly most initiatives lacked secure sources of funding to ensure sustainability.

The overall regional food security strategy focused on *harmonizing policies, sharing information, building institutional capacity, and strengthening the application of science and technology*. Accordingly, the overall strategy was to enhance capacity of member states through closer regional cooperation in sustainable food production, improved marketing, and reducing constraints on access and wide distribution. The areas of regional action that the strategy covered maximized the three stages of food production, marketing and consumption facilitation.

The region has also been pursuing a Drought Resilience Initiative<sup>5</sup> aimed at addressing the effects of drought and related shocks in the region in a sustainable and holistic manner. The new initiative is intended to link peace building, development and disaster risk management efforts to build a holistic approach to drought responses across the region, working through national, regional, and international actors and stakeholders. The new approach specifically includes cross-border programming, by putting resilience at the heart of development and relief efforts.

The regional initiative thus identifies seven priority intervention areas that include (i) ensuring equitable access and sustainable use of natural resources; (ii) enhancing market access, facilitating trade and availing versatile financial services; (iii) providing equitable access to livelihood support and basic social services; (iv) improving disaster risk management capabilities and preparedness for effective response; (v) enhancing the generation and use of knowledge, technology and innovation; (vi) promoting conflict prevention and peace building;

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://resilience.igad.int/about-iddrsi/>.

and (vii) strengthening coordination and institutional arrangements for collaborative and synergistic actions.

The recurring severe droughts in the region that exacerbated chronic food insecurity, leading to famine in some areas, highlighted the importance of focusing on sustainable adaptation and the urgent need to invest in resilience building as a means to end drought emergencies in the region. In the past, efforts were more concentrated in managing the drought disasters and related humanitarian emergencies.

The new and favored approach is to focus on the underlying causes and approach disaster management through pro-active, preventive and structural development oriented solutions. The new approach emphasizes the need for countries to work together as a region; adopt the twin track approach where emergency response is linked to recovery and long-term development; focus on priority intervention areas as identified by target communities and member states; and ensure that the design, development and implementation of the interventions take into account all aspects of building human resilience.

The new approach also identified opportunities for promoting drought resilience in the region through strengthened and more collaborative inter-governmental actions, including:

- Establishing regional mechanisms for cooperation to address cross-border drought issues, and strengthening early warning systems;
- Demonstrating capacity development of institutions and key actors in drought management and resilience building;
- Promoting policy development and enhanced partnerships for Integrated Drought Management and resilience building; and
- Mainstreaming drought mitigation and adaptation strategies in relevant government sector ministries and agencies.

### **3. Climate change response and global governance**

At the global level, the first SDG calls to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” and the second SDG goal targets “to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030. The realization of these lofty goals appears distant for the vulnerable communities of the HoA and many other regions of the world. Additionally, there is overwhelming evidence and near global consensus that climate change is among the leading causes of the rising global hunger and that without universal mitigation of the principal man-made causes, the largest burden will fall disproportionately on those that have the least effective means to mitigate its effects or adapt to it.

The number of extreme climate-related disasters, including extreme heat, droughts, floods and storms, and massive fires has increased exponentially, with these events occurring annually with more frequency around the globe. Based on the globally documented extreme weather events, land degradation and desertification, water scarcity and rising sea levels, climate change already undermines global efforts to eradicate hunger. The number of people who lived in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 a day were 696 million in 2017.<sup>6</sup> Global extreme poverty is estimated to have risen in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic pushed an additional 97 million people into extreme poverty.<sup>7</sup>

The heads of the United Nations relevant bodies and the leadership of most nations, both developed and less developed, have been calling for an integrated approach to counter the

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank, “Global poverty update”, March 2021.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank, “Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021?”, 24 June 2021.

adverse effects of climate change on food security and for ensuring the wellbeing of human existence at the universal level. In this context, *to achieve a world without hunger and poverty in all its forms by 2030, it is imperative that actions to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of food systems and people's livelihoods in response to climate variability and extremes be accelerated and scaled up.*

In several regions of the world, in particular the Horn of Africa countries and among the small Island states in major oceans, the global climate crisis is leading to definite existential threat in the near term. In the case of the HoA region, the rising temperatures attributed to carbon dioxide (Co<sub>2</sub>) emissions and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) is leading to frequent and extreme droughts, floods and extreme heat that have contributed to prevalent food insecurity and famine that is occurring with unprecedented frequency. What is particularly relevant is that these worst affected regions and states have extremely limited contribution, if any, to the GHG emissions contributing to the global warming and its adverse impact.

For decades, the member countries of the region and their international development partners have announced grand initiatives to address the issue of climate change and building resilience. Among the well-known initiatives that have contributed to high expectations and to less sustained results are several international initiatives to address food security as a global issue including:

- (i) the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative in the mid 1990s by the United States administration. It promises to alleviate the severe food shortage in the HoA, in particular through preventive measures, food stocking and investments to augment reliable and sustainable food production, particularly by addressing adverse climate change impact; and
- (ii) in 2014, international and regional development finance institutions pledged to aid the countries in the HoA region more than \$8 billion to promote stability and development in the Horn of Africa, and especially to provide the tools to address food insecurity among the vulnerable communities.

The story of the adverse impacts of climate change on the HoA sub region is a classic example of the lack of equity in global affairs where power prevails over the rule of law and justice delivery for sound decision making. Global response to the impact of climate change on food security has not been fully addressed.

Global governance of climate change, according to J. Hattingh, *does not focus on the principles of fair decision-making in the international context about the targets that should be pursued to mitigate or adapt to climate change. Many of those who will be most harmed by climate change have contributed little to causing the problem; many of those who emit the most GHGs are relatively less threatened by adverse climate change impacts; and those that are most vulnerable to its harm are often least able to pay for adaptation and mitigation measures that are needed to protect them from adverse impacts.*<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. Conclusions**

Food insecurity has been rising in the HoA in recent years and adverse climate extremes, conflicts, economic shocks and downturns have been the key drivers. The region is not on track to eliminate hunger by 2030, and action is urgently required to address these key underlying determinants of food insecurity and nutrition. Commodity dependent countries suffer frequent terms of trade shocks that threaten the food security and nutrition of large parts

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<sup>8</sup> Johan Hattingh, "Whose Climate, which Ethics? On the Foundations of Climate Change Law", in *Climate Change: International Law and Global Governance: Volume I: Legal Responses and Global Responsibility*, Oliver C. Ruppel, Christian Roschmann and Katharina Ruppel-Schlichting, eds. (Germany, Nomos, 2013).

of the population. In the last two years, economic slowdown and downturns attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to rising food insecurity and increasing poverty.

Increasingly countries are adopting social protection programs to address poverty and food insecurity. The experience in the preceding decade shows that such programs, when adequately designed, are also effective instruments to respond to shocks. In the longer-term, countries must develop policies and invest to achieve a more diversified economy and an inclusive structural transformation, reducing food insecurity and tackling the multiple forms of malnutrition.

Furthermore, addressing food insecurity through building human capital and strengthening access to the use of basic services also helps to reduce inequality. Finally, policies and interventions must focus on promoting nutrition-sensitive food systems (which encompass the entire range of interlinked activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products) that can promote and sustain healthy diets.

Considerable challenges to ending hunger and malnutrition remain. The deterioration in the food security situation in the HoA remains a challenge and the outlook is unfavorable to end hunger and achieve key SDG2 targets, unless the region addresses the main drivers of food insecurity, i.e. conflicts, climate extremes, and economic shocks. These drivers overlap and are often connected through their negative impact on livelihoods, and pose a daunting challenge to achieving zero hunger in the future.

The key drivers of conflicts, adverse climate change and economic shocks often overlap and in all cases, and they worsen food insecurity and poverty outcomes. Central to addressing the threat from these shocks are building and strengthening national-level resilience, while implementing effective policy interventions and programs that are relevant across these drivers. Many different sectors and actors are involved, and successfully addressing the food security and nutrition challenges faced by countries, communities and households requires policy coherence and integrated resilience measures.

Finally, there is overwhelming evidence and global consensus that climate change is among the leading causes of the rising hunger in the world. More significantly, it is generally recognized that without universal mitigation of the principal man-made causes (greenhouse gas emissions), the largest burden will fall disproportionately on those that have contributed the least to such causes, and that have limited means to mitigate its effects or adapt to it.

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