
SOHS 2018 CASE STUDY:

KENYA



ALNAP is a global network of humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve the response to humanitarian crises.

Groupe URD is an independent institute which specialises in the analysis of practices and the development of policy for the humanitarian and post-crisis sectors.

About this case study

This case study is one in a series of five research pieces which fed into the analysis for *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018*. This research was conducted and written in April 2018.

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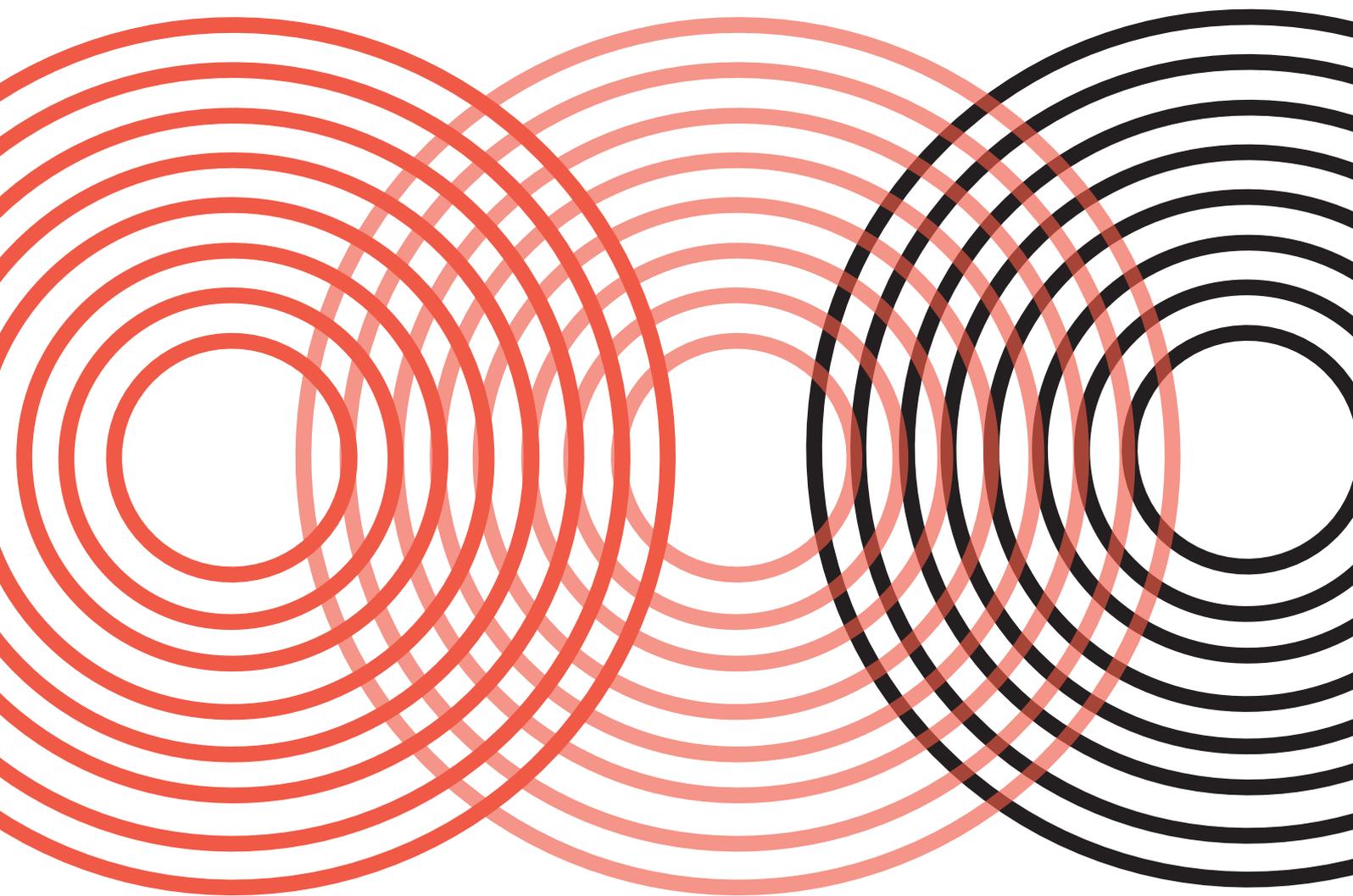
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Acronyms

ASAL	arid and semi-arid land
CBO	community-based organisation
CSG	County Steering Group
CTP	cash transfer programming/programme
DCF	Drought Contingency Fund
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission
HSNP	Hunger Safety Net Programme
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KFSSG	Kenya Food Security Steering Group
OCHA	UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
NDEF	National Drought Emergency Fund
NDMA	National Drought Management Authority
NSNP	National Safety Nets Programme
SOHS	<i>The State of the Humanitarian System report</i>
WFP	World Food Programme

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Executive summary

Successive episodes of drought and failed harvests, migrations, displacements, food insecurity and economic shocks affecting the most vulnerable have all created an ongoing need for humanitarian aid in Kenya and a response that has evolved over the past decade.

An overlooked crisis

The 2016–2017 drought in the Horn of Africa is described as one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in decades (OCHA, 2017d). Notwithstanding this, the international community's attention has focused elsewhere, such as the deteriorating situations in Syria and the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, and since Kenya was classified as a lower middle-income country in 2014 (World Bank, 2015). Along with drought, Kenya has been managing a refugee crisis. All this during a general election year in a country with a history of civil violence in times of elections.

Key impacts of this drought crisis were displacement, migration and increased reports of disease outbreaks (due to water shortages), directly affecting an estimated 2.6 million people (OCHA, 2017c). Malnutrition rates in some arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) are extremely critical. Livestock conflicts and deaths have been reported. In northern Kenya, parts of Marsabit, Wajir and Turkana face conflicts between pastoralists, severe security challenges from Al-Shabaab attacks and intercommunal violence, which restrict access to these areas for humanitarian workers or Kenyan authorities. Severe protection issues are reported and some sectors, such as education and health, have not been prioritised for funding.

Despite many constraints, the humanitarian sector in Kenya has managed to deliver many essential services to affected communities. Most actors agree that the response to this crisis is better and more effective than that of 2011. Many of the same challenges for humanitarian response remained – late response, delayed funding from donors, coordination issues, and so on. It is worth noting that many of the improvements in this crisis are thanks to the government's leadership and to the increased use of crisis modifiers¹ in development programmes.

Kenya's government-led humanitarian response...

Unlike previous droughts, the 2016–2017 response was not led by humanitarian actors but by national and county institutions. The Kenyan government has played a major role, especially the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), which is responsible for the Ending Drought Emergencies strategy. Since 2011, political, legal and institutional reforms have clarified the response to drought mechanisms, in terms of required systems, i.e. institution, financing, information management and coordination.

Coordination of sectoral response is led by the line ministries. The Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG), for example, plays a major coordinating role by enabling food security-related interventions to be prioritised by sector at county and national levels by the government, donors, the United Nations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

... with innovative approaches

Kenyan authorities have significantly expanded their capacity to respond to natural disasters, including by creating contingency plans and boosting investment in preventive and mitigation measures. At the same time, NGOs and donors have developed several mechanisms that incorporate resilience approaches and deal with fast-onset disasters. Cash transfer programming has played a major role in this crisis response, more so than in previous humanitarian responses in Kenya. One reason for this is the wide use of unconditional cash transfer distribution through different social protection and safety net programmes such as the Hunger Safety Net Programme.

But challenges remain

Although the response's effectiveness is recognised, there is still need to improve efficiency. The drought response has benefited from strong government leadership and has been relatively timely, although most of the humanitarian response only started in April or May 2017 (except for the World Food Programme and the Red Cross). However there has been a lack of skilled human resources and information-sharing at government level is somewhat opaque, which undermines transparency and hinders clear accountability to beneficiaries and donors. In addition, aid actors observed a tendency to politicise aid because of the electoral agenda.

Finally, a lack of infrastructure, geographical distances and security threats prevent assistance from reaching its targets and make coverage a real challenge in remote areas of Kenya that risk being left behind.

Introduction

This country case study on Kenya is part of the 2018 edition of *The State of the Humanitarian System* (SOHS).

The present report brings together the results of a field visit to Kenya in July 2017. It is based on a series of interviews in Nairobi and in Turkana County (Lodwar and Kakuma refugee settlement areas), with staff from Kenyan institutions (central and decentralised levels), UN agencies, international, national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Kenya Red Cross, as well as beneficiaries. In all, 29 interviews took place, either individually or as part of focus groups, with a total of 42 interviewees. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, based on the interview protocol developed within the framework of the SOHS research methodology. All interviews were transcribed and coded with a qualitative analysis. Findings were reached through a combination of literature review, knowledge of the country context and thorough analysis of the interviews with all stakeholders met during the field mission. The report also makes the best possible use of existing reports on humanitarian aid in Kenya (see Bibliography).

1. Context overview

The Horn of Africa region is one of the most food-insecure regions in the world. It is regularly affected by severe climate-related crises such as drought and flash floods, and by migratory pests. It is also plagued by conflicts spilling over from some of the longest-running civil wars, making it an extremely volatile region, subject to regular massive population displacements.

1.1 A severe drought in northern Kenya

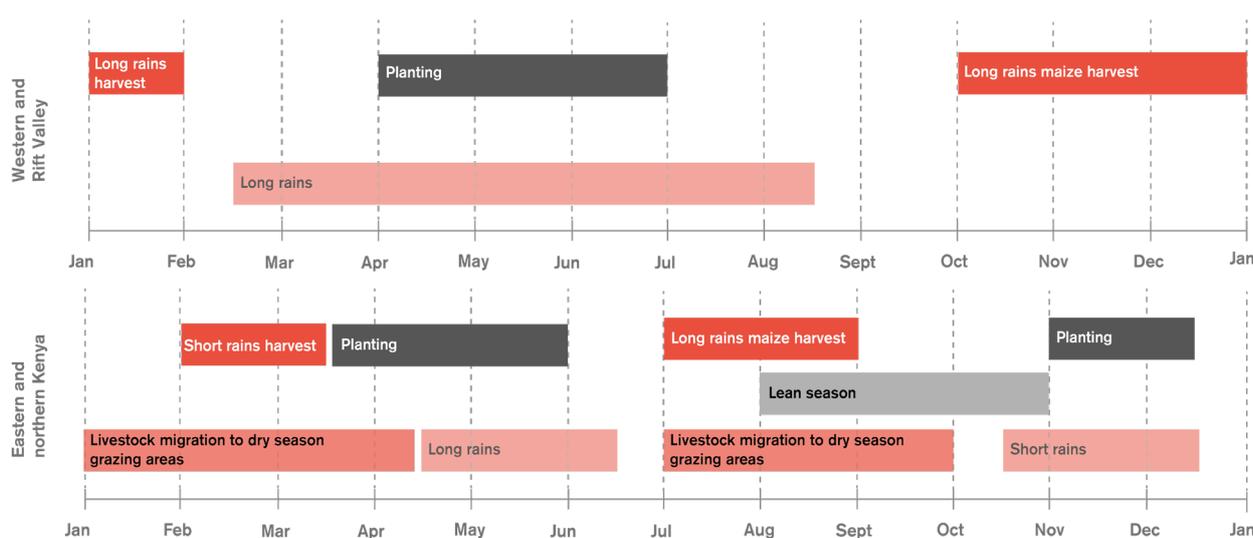
Along with other countries in the Horn of Africa, Kenya has faced a severe food crisis since 2016 and throughout 2017, due to drought recurring in shorter cycles, despite efforts to reduce vulnerability. The areas of Kenya experiencing the worst effects of drought also contend with entrenched poverty, limited investment and intermittent conflict, which further compound food insecurity and malnutrition.

On 10 February 2017, the Government of Kenya declared a national drought emergency. This signalled a recognition that at least 23 of the 47 counties in the country were experiencing a devastating food situation, in terms of access to water and nutrition. The situation was largely

attributed to the poor performance of the October–November 2016 short rains. These started late, were inadequate and brief, leading to poor crop performance, and water and pasture shortage, more so in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of the country. The condition of livestock deteriorated and, in some cases, livestock mortality was reported (as the failed rains followed a normally dry June and September period). Affected areas also grappled with a shortage of safe drinking water, water for household use and increased risk of malnutrition.

The Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) – a multi-sectoral and multi-agency body comprising the government, UN agencies and NGOs under the leadership of the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) – conducted a long rains assessment of the 2017 season. The failed long rains of that year make a total of three consecutive failed rainy seasons. All bear similar characteristics – a delayed start, widespread below-average rainfall amounts in large parts of the country and poor distribution. Signs of drought-related stress were reported in at least 10 ASAL counties by September 2016. Kilifi County was unique, given that by then it was already classified as in the alarm phase of drought. Over the following months, the country’s early warning system showed drought progressing through half of the country’s counties (NDMA, 2016). The long rains assessment report released in July 2017 showed the number of people affected by the drought and who are food-insecure had risen from 2.6 million to 3.4 million (KFSSG, 2017).

Figure 1 / Kenya’s seasonal calendar in a typical year



Source: Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET n.d.)

The country is experiencing more frequent, increasingly severe and longer natural climate-related events and disasters, particularly droughts and floods, which recur within a shorter period. More than 70% of the population is reliant on the agriculture and livestock sectors, which are also the most affected by climate vagaries.

The 2016–2017 drought came as the country was still counting the estimated \$12.1 billion costs of the 2008–2011 drought – described as one of the most severe humanitarian crises in decades (Government of Kenya, 2012). Between these two drought episodes, significant changes have been made to how the crisis is managed, with the Kenyan government playing a major role in leading the response whereas in 2008–2011 the humanitarian system was mostly in charge (NDMA, 2017b).

The drought has affected the ASALs more than other parts of the country. The food insecurity situation is exacerbated by resource-based conflicts in some border areas of counties, more so where pastoralists converge. This makes humanitarian assistance a risky venture. Cattle rustling incidences, displacement of families and conflicts between pastoralists and ranchers are reported. Security challenges posed by Al-Shabaab attacks and intercommunal violence curtail people's ability to forage and reach markets, cause displacement and the loss of critical assets such as livestock. In some areas, school closure is common and a number of protection issues, related to negative coping mechanisms affecting women and children, have arisen. Some counties reported that human and wildlife were increasingly competing over decreased pasture and water sources (NDMA, 2017c).

“ The food prices have increased by over 150%. So ... if you are buying maize for 90 shillings, now it's 200 shillings, and that means you can only eat it for ... three or four meals max, it's gone. ”

OFDA Regional Programme Specialist in Kenya

Poor production has resulted in remarkably high food prices, which have increased steadily since January 2017. A scan of market prices in supermarkets showed a shortage and rationing of the staple maize flour. At the peak of the drought, a 2 kg packet of sifted maize flour was at a five-year record high (KFSSG, 2017).

Export bans are exacerbating these shortages, and inflation has constrained household purchasing power and access to food. Kenya imports many of its staple foods. However, supplies from Uganda and Tanzania are also low due to poor regional harvests. In addition, strained diplomatic and trade relations between Kenya and Tanzania led to retaliatory grains export bans and restrictions, with Tanzania citing a threat to its own food security.

1.2 A prolonged refugee crisis

For a long time, Kenya has been hosting some of the largest numbers of refugees in Africa, taking in hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflicts, instability and hunger in the East African region. Dadaab is the oldest refugee camp in the world, opened in 1991 to shelter the Somalian refugees fleeing their civil war. It was intended for 90,000 people and has since hosted up to 500,000 refugees.²

In 2017, the majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya still came from Somalia (60%); other major nationalities were South Sudanese (22%), Congolese (7%) and Ethiopian (5.6%). Other nationals from Sudan, Rwanda, Eritrea, Burundi, Uganda and others make up about 5% of the total population. Almost half of the refugees in Kenya (49%) reside in the Dadaab/Alinjugur area, 38% in Kakuma and 13% in urban areas (mainly Nairobi) (UNHCR, 2017).

For the past two decades, Kenya had pursued policies for joint encampment and regulated urban self-settlement, the latter allowing for informal employment. However, the government has enforced a strict encampment policy since 2012 that they justified after accusing refugees of having plotted a series of terrorist attacks from the camps. This required all refugees and asylum seekers to relocate in the main to the designated camps of Dadaab and Kakuma. On the same grounds, the government decided to shut down Dadaab refugee camp in 2016 but has not been able to implement the decision as the Kenyan court blocked the move. This followed large protests by refugees, aid workers and rights groups, arguing that Somalian refugees could not be forced to return to their country, which was still at war.³

1.3 A government-led response

Previously, humanitarian agencies were on the front line in responding to and managing drought crises. The 2016–2017 episode saw the process largely controlled by the state (national and county government). This was in line with the requirement by Kenya's 2010 Constitution for the state to protect the vulnerable as well as uphold the right to be free from hunger and to have adequate food of acceptable quality (Article 43).⁴ Policy, legal and institutional framework reforms have enabled this by clarifying what is needed in terms of the systems' response to drought – i.e. the institutions, the funding, information management and coordination.

Responsibility devolved to counties in Kenya's new Constitution

The pillar of Kenya's new Constitution, promulgated in 2010, was devolution. In what was one of the world's most ambitious decentralisation processes, the country has created 47 regional governments.

Devolution's main aims include equity and bringing services closer to the people. It is seen as the 'magic bullet' to address post-independence years of central government control of resources, which was blamed for stifling development. It was also hoped that it would address perceived unfair distribution of economic resources that resulted in decades of marginalisation of some quarters. Devolution intends to promote easier access to public services throughout the country, enhance accountability, reduce poverty, promote social and economic development through more equitable sharing of national and local resources, bridge the development gap between rich and poor regions, and thus empower previously marginalised groups and communities. County governments are the main centres for distributing resources at grassroots levels. This includes responding to disasters and emergencies.

Schedule 4 of the 2010 Constitution stipulates the devolution of sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation services, disaster management and aspects of natural resources and environmental conservation, including soil and water conservation. The transfer of substantial financial resources, from the national to local level means county government is the first line of response during emergencies like drought and food insecurity. The counties became active in 2013, so the 2016/2017 drought tested this first generation of county governments. When the drought was declared a national disaster, it was expected that counties would be forced to review their budgets in order to prioritise responses and mitigation measures against the ravages of the drought. County governments continue to play a critical role in drought response. They have been at the forefront of activities such as water trucking, rehabilitation of water points and infrastructure, and provision of relief. A number of counties at the height of the drought reorganised their budgets to reallocate funds and to reprioritise drought emergency interventions.

1.3.1 A major role for the National Drought Management Authority

In the current drought management and response, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) has played several critical lead roles.

First is the production and dissemination of climate and drought information. The NDMA holds the mandate to manage the country's drought early warning systems so as to ensure timely and credible early warning information on drought risks, which is key for planning for different stakeholders. On a monthly basis, the NDMA produces a National Drought Early Warning Bulletin which provides an overall picture of the country and summarises the County bulletins produced for each of the 23 ASAL counties. In collaboration with the Kenya Meteorological Department, these cover climatic indicators' performance, the food security situation and other factors that have an implication on the food security situation – for instance, the presence and prevalence of insecurity and conflicts. The national bulletin is particularly interesting since it classifies counties in terms of the IPC Drought classification phases,⁵ thus identifying clear priorities for response.

The NDMA has been central to conducting the bi-annual rains assessment under the auspices of the KFSSG. The long and short rains assessments, which help to measure the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, have played a key role in defining and determining various actors' responses to the 2016–2017 drought. The data generated, for instance, in the short rains assessment in late 2016 was central to preparing the UN's Flash Appeal in March 2017,⁶ and in guiding actions. Similarly, the long rains assessment in 2017 has led to the revision of that appeal. Indeed, interviews with various actors show that this early warning system has been a defining factor in the ongoing drought, influencing early action to avert a crisis similar to that seen in 2011. The Kenyan government's early warning system began flagging drought stress in coastal areas in June 2016. This prompted the NDMA to release drought contingency funds to the various counties as early as July 2016 and to scale up the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in December 2016.⁷

“ What is interesting in Kenya, the government had been already talking about the drought from last year, in July, August. So, it's not like the government was ... very quiet, and didn't talk about it. ”

Country Director for Oxfam in Kenya

The assessments largely influenced action from government including the cabinet memo in November 2016 to allocate Ksh210 million (\$2 million) for the drought response. It also influenced a few humanitarian actors. The Kenya Red Cross put in a request for the International Federation to launch an emergency appeal in November 2016, based on the KFSSG long rains assessment. The World Food Programme (WFP) also made use of these early warnings.

In terms of actual response mechanisms and activities, the NDMA has been implementing programmes directly, indirectly or under the HSNP which it implements in collaboration with Equity Bank, thus benefiting from the bank's large network of agents.

The Ending Drought Emergencies Strategy

The NDMA is responsible for the Ending Drought Emergencies strategy that is seen as a key foundation to attain national growth and development – specifically, the 10% GDP growth target envisaged in Kenya's Vision 2030 programme. The strategy is a commitment by the Kenyan government to end by 2022 the worst of the suffering and hunger caused by droughts. It is operationalised through a Common Programme Framework steered and supported by the NDMA, and it focuses on the 23 most drought-prone ASAL counties. The framework puts at its centre three key elements:

1. A multi-sectoral approach to sustainable development that pushes for stronger complementarity of interventions across separate sectors, given that most problems and their solutions are inter-related. For example, the lack of water has dire consequences for health, while social protection mechanisms such as cash transfers can enhance school retention rates.
2. A push towards multi-agency collaboration with a strong emphasis on country ownership and leadership. Specifically, it argues for synergies and harmonised investment and actions between the national government, county governments and development partners, to enhance coherence, effectiveness and efficiency. From interviews with donors, the overriding message is the support of existing government structures and systems, i.e. the drought contingency fund and an NDMA-led but county-supported and aligned process, rather than parallel systems as previously.
3. A recognition of the need to go beyond the traditional humanitarian–development divide as envisaged under the resilience-building discourse and approach, to recognise that vulnerable communities in ASALs face a multiplicity of complex and inter-related risks in an unpredictable environment. The only approach that makes sense in such a situation has to be ‘holistic and integrated’.

For instance, in collaboration with the Kenya Defence Forces, the NDMA has directly offered livestock supplementary feeding in some ASAL counties. It also directly implemented livestock off-taking, i.e. purchase of animals to prevent losses and then using the same animals to feed the same or separate communities. Indirectly, it administers drought contingency finance to support counties in dealing with drought, floods and other risks through the Drought Contingency Fund (DCF). The DCF is a contingency fund, heavily backed by the European Union, aimed at facilitating timely response in countries to drought during its different stages. It covers the shortfall in funding that occurs when there are delays between governments receiving early warnings on droughts and being able to raise and disburse funds to respond. The DCF was activated for Kenya in June 2014. It provides emergency funds while the country awaits the start of its own National Drought Emergency Fund (NDEF) established under the NDMA Act 2016, and which came into place in April 2017. When fully operational, the NDEF acts as a common multi-donor basket emergency fund that can be activated to fund adequate interventions to mitigate the impact of drought-related crises, to minimise the negative effects of drought and to fund capacity and technical expertise development to improve drought management. The DCF facilitated the release of \$2.3 million of drought contingency finance in 21 counties between July 2016 and March 2017 (NDMA, 2017a), meant for quick action on livestock, water, health and nutrition, education, and peace and security sectors before they deteriorated due to the drought.

2. Analysis and findings

2.1 Effectiveness

Overall, the drought response has benefited from strong government leadership and has been relatively timely. Most aid actors mention that they were able to shift to emergency activities through their crisis modifier⁸ systems. However, a few aid actors considered that the government was late in declaring the emergency. This meant that they were unable to make international funding appeals early enough in 2017, as donors would not release funding unless the emergency was declared.

Insufficient county and national-level government human resources allocated to monitoring, data collection and sometimes even implementation, can affect information accuracy and lead to delays in reaching the beneficiaries. Some actors blamed the NDMA, the main agency dealing with the drought crisis; they said that because the whole devolution process was still ongoing, it may have slowed down some coordination efforts and somehow hampered the effectiveness of the response. Still, most stakeholders praised the coordination ensured by the NDMA.

Many key informants felt that the crisis management had improved, and that the response to this drought was better than in 2011. Several said that physiological factors, such as rainfall levels and grazing areas patterns, were worse, and yet the outcome of the response was better.

2.2 Coordination mechanisms

As the response to the 2016–2017 drought mainly relies on cash transfer programming, strong coordination is essential.

The NDMA 2016 Act identifies the need for a drought coordination institutional framework. Drought is considered a multi-sector, cross-cutting issue that requires cooperation by a variety of public and private sector agencies at different levels.

The Act sets out the main responsibility of a national body to provide policy guidance on drought and climate change. This forum can also support the coordination of the drought response. This occurred with the inter-governmental and inter-agency drought response coordination technical committee established by the government at the national level in February 2017.

There are several other important coordination mechanisms at this level. The line ministries lead the coordination of sectoral response. According to an April 2017 report by the Kenya Humanitarian Partnership Team, there are seven sectors adapted to the Kenyan context currently active in the country – i.e. Agriculture and Livelihoods, Early Recovery, Education, Food Security, Health and Nutrition, Protection and WASH. Aid agencies also provide assistance in this coordination process, and mainly technical support to government, through the secondment of specialists to key line ministries – e.g. information management specialists to assist in rolling out information management tools, such as the 5W and cluster dashboards, aimed at improving general monitoring and reporting of the response.

The Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government holds the mandates for disasters and emergency response coordination, management of refugee policy and the National Disaster and Operation Centre. The Department of Refugee Affairs, working closely with UN agencies and NGOs, coordinates assistance to refugees.

The KFSSG, whose chair is the chief executive officer of the NDMA, and which is co-chaired by WFP's country representative, is the main body in charge of food security assessments. The KFSSG is also the technical working group for the IPC process in Kenya. The group undertakes the bi-annual long rains (July/Aug) and the short rains (Jan/Feb) assessments which, over time, have become the main basis for decision-making on food security and nutrition interventions, and in 2017, the drought response. The KFSSG plays a major coordinating role by enabling food security-related interventions to be prioritised by sector at county and national levels by the government, donors, the UN and NGOs. However, the most important coordination role is at the county level where drought-related interventions are implemented. A county forum – the County Steering Group (CSG) – is established in all drought-prone counties to coordinate and oversee drought-related interventions. The CSG is active in varying degrees in each of the 23 ASAL counties, carrying out inter-sector coordination between governmental and non-governmental actors for both development and emergency plans. The CSG includes all national and international, humanitarian and development organisations, community-based organisations (CBOs) and religious organisations that are active in the county.

This is co-chaired by the national government (i.e. county commissioner) and the county government (i.e. county governor), and the NDMA acts as its secretariat.

Discussions with various CSG members indicated that generally the CSG platform manages to bring actors to the table. In many counties, they had regular meetings involving a variety of stakeholders, during the drought response period. Good relations and networks have been established between agencies and the government, but sometimes these are only bilateral. The CSG also functions as a platform for 'incoming' organisations to introduce their programmes into the counties.

However, these platforms have not been successful in influencing agencies' way of working; they function largely as a mechanism or platform for information-sharing. The CSG has very little influence over targeting criteria for instance, or even the geographical focus of the various agencies. In most cases these were decided from their headquarters in Nairobi. Cases of duplication and parallel activities are still cited. Identifying and prioritising areas of need is difficult to achieve in counties where basic 3W ('who is doing what where') matrixes are missing. In other cases, even national government agencies that are members of the CSG were said to bypass the CSG forum when distributing food relief.

One area where coordination seems to work better is the NDMA master register and ATM cards under the HSNP Programme. HSNP, with support from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), developed a master database of beneficiaries, and issued them with ATM cards. Given the fact that the programme cannot reach everyone at the moment, some agencies in consultation with the community use 'outdated' registration lists as a starting point to identify beneficiaries for cash transfers as part of the drought emergency response. However, even in such cases, the amounts issued are not harmonised. Harmonisation is discussed at both national and county levels. At the national level, the idea of establishing a cash working group was hinted at in the interviews but there are no indications of when and if this would actually happen.⁹

It is also worth noting that at the county level, there are more technical and thematic groups around specific sectors such as water, health and nutrition etc., often chaired by the relevant county department (e.g. water), but with support from an NGO or UN agency. Often, these are meant to deal with issues within a sector as well as have their work feed into the wider multi-sector county planning and response processes in terms of assessments, emergency preparedness, response and contingency planning. In some counties and sectors, these technical groups are very active and useful in directing aid.

2.3 Coverage

2.3.1 Level of funding

After the Government of Kenya declared the drought a national disaster, the UN issued a humanitarian Flash Appeal in March 2017. However, since the launch of the Flash Appeal, the situation has continued to deteriorate. The mid-season assessment and long rains assessment – carried out at the beginning of May and July 2017 respectively – both showed a sharp deterioration in the food security of the population and the nutrition status of children, particularly in 11 out of 23 ASAL counties.

“ The government of Kenya is doing its part, with its resources stretched to breaking point. So should we. ”

Nairobi-based UN country coordinator

The appeal was for \$165.71 million to reach 2.6 million people with life-saving assistance until the end of 2017. It complemented the government’s nine-month response plan (November 2016 to July 2017), and in addition focused on funding needs for the period August to December 2017, not covered by the government’s drought response plan. Some actors found the initial appeal level too high, with some needs somehow artificially inflated for political reasons so as to receive more money. It was later revised to a more realistic figure.

The revised flash appeal issued on 1 September 2017 showed that there were 5.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Kenya.¹⁰ Of these, 2.6 million were still facing severe food insecurity. By the end of 2017, 136.1% of the drought response appeal was funded whereas in September 2017, when the revised appeal was published, only 43% of the March appeal had been secured, which means that many activities probably came too late to avoid widening the drought’s impact.

The official statistics mention ‘zero death’ during this crisis, which can be considered a major accomplishment. However, some concerns were raised by humanitarian stakeholders who were alarmed by the very high level of malnutrition in the childhood population, notably in Turkana County, throwing doubt on the veracity of the official government estimates.

“ Kenya is able, with its [middle-income] status now, to take care of its citizens. So the challenge for us going forward is how do we bring out the true picture of the impact of this drought outside to the external community, the international community so they’re able to support with resources. ”

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

In the future, donors will most likely not focus their funding on this crisis as the number and intensity of other crises in the world – Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, South Sudan, Bangladesh – stretch the availability of funds. As Kenya is a middle-income country, this now affects the funding available for this crisis. In effect, this acts as an incentive from donors to governments of middle-income countries to find funding needed in domestic crises, in the same way as they have begun to lead and manage their own responses.

“ You know, it happens that we don't want to go in areas 50 km from the border for security and if our local partners there are also worried, then we will not force them to go either. Because we cannot transfer the risk to local partners. Thus, we are not sure what's happening in those areas; whether people from these areas are in need is something that we are not very aware of. ”

Humanitarian worker

2.3.2 Geographic coverage

The ARALs affected by the drought represent 80% of the Kenyan territory but only 10% of the population live in these areas – approximately 10 million people among whom 4 million are pastoralists, who are very sensitive to climate variations and specifically vulnerable to drought (Kigomo, 2001).

“ ... the humanitarian response by certain politically driven institutions, is not adhering to the principles (Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, Independence). Lots of manipulation of the beneficiary. ”

Humanitarian worker

When sufficient funding is available, aid stakeholders and county government teams are able to access more areas and provide a better geographic coverage. However, other reasons prevent assistance from reaching the targets. Long distances and poor infrastructure in the ASALs make coverage a real challenge. Also, border areas are not always accessible for security reasons, including land conflicts, raids and armed groups. Within this context, the Kenya Red Cross is a much-appreciated national actor, working in insecure areas, ensuring better coverage of unsafe and remote regions.

“ ... food is also used as a political tool sometimes. Politicians want to politicise everything and, you know, sometimes you just create it artificially, to use it as a campaign tool, okay? ”

Ministry of Devolution and Planning worker

Sector overview

Food security: In Kenya, there are 3.4 million food-insecure people, according to most recent assessments (UN Flash Appeal, 2017). This includes 2.6 million people already facing severe food insecurity (IPC Phases 3 and 4), and 800,000 people facing stressed food security (IPC Phase 2) who were expected to fall into crisis levels by October 2017 (OCHA, 2017b). The early warning bulletins by the NDMA highlighted that the outbreaks of the farming pests Fall Armyworm and African Armyworm and their impact compounded the atypical low agricultural production, which further threatened crop production (NDMA, 2017b).

Pastoralists occupy environmentally fragile areas with high rates of environmental degradation. Therefore, low vegetation coverage has devastating effects in these chiefly pastoral areas where the majority do not have livestock insurance. Livestock losses as a result of the drought were estimated at more than 90% in some areas (OCHA, 2017d).

Health and Nutrition: Malnutrition rates in some ASALs are extremely critical. The June 2017 Nutrition Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) Survey showed that the nutrition situation in parts of Turkana, Marsabit and Mandera Counties had greatly deteriorated with GAM rates of above 30% being reported (Turkana SMART Survey, 2017).¹¹ These areas also exhibit high levels of vulnerability and poverty – related to decades of state neglect and marginalisation. A nurses' strike¹² also affected the nutrition response, with 50% to 80% of health facilities not functioning in six drought-affected counties. A total of 47,986 children (57% of the annual target) and 91,319 children (53% of the annual target) were registered for the treatment of SAM and MAM respectively.

In October 2017, five counties had active cholera outbreaks with 2,743 cases including 44 deaths (case fatality rate of (CFR) 1.6%) reported. Most new cases were from Nairobi. Dengue has reportedly been controlled in Mombasa and Wajir, with 1,537 cases reported from the two counties, including one death. The number of cases of Kala-azar (Leishmaniasis) continued to rise, with 457 cases and seven deaths reported in Wajir and Marsabit counties at the time of the study in 2017.

Education: There are important gaps in this sector, as education was not considered a priority given the insufficient funding. Decline in enrolment and attendance is noted in northern Kenya, as parents migrate with their children and livestock in search of forage and water. The WFP has reduced school feeding programmes which has affected school attendance.

Protection: Drought and food insecurity in northern Kenya is resulting in increased incidents of gender-based violence, early and forced marriage, and women and girls engaging in transactional sex.

Kenya hosts close to 500,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan, Somalia and the Great Lakes region. They stay in urban centres and in camps in Garissa and Turkana counties. More than 90,000 refugees have arrived in Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps since conflict broke out in South Sudan in 2013.

WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene): Drought-related displacement, migration and increased reports of disease outbreaks (due to water shortages) have been a key feature of this drought, with an estimated 2.6 million people directly affected. People had to walk three times longer to access water, as in Baringo County. Children, pregnant and lactating women, and older people have borne the brunt of the catastrophe (OCHA, 2017d).

3. Efficiency and challenges

3.1 Cash transfer programming

Many believe cash transfer programming (CTP) has been a significant contribution to the efficiency of the response to the drought, as well as a modality that supports the dignity of crisis-affected people. CTP has been used more than in any other previous humanitarian response in Kenya. There has been wide implementation of unconditional cash transfer distribution through different social protection and safety net programmes.

According to most stakeholders, the logistics costs saved by opting for CTP rather than food assistance or water trucking activities, in areas where markets are available, have greatly enhanced efficiency.

3.1.1. Government cash transfer programmes

The Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) is one of the four government cash transfer programmes under the National Safety Nets Programme (NSNP). The other three include the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Older Persons Cash Transfer and Persons with Severe Disabilities Cash Transfer – although these are not necessarily in response to the drought.

The Hunger Safety Net Programme¹³ is planned as a regular, unconditional and electronic CTP that targets 100,000 poor and vulnerable residents in the country's arid northern counties of Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir. Regular transfers have increased from about \$25 to \$50. The programme contains an emergency scalability element that responds to emerging crises and shocks such as drought and floods. The 2016–2017 drought is the second time this scalability element has been activated to cushion additional households from the effects. The first was in 2015. However, 2016–2017 has been the first high-magnitude and widespread drought that has taken place since the scalability mechanism was put in

place. The scale-up began in November 2016. It reached a maximum point in May 2017. Usually 100,000 households receive the help. On top of this, up to 82,000 households also got help. These receive \$25 – an amount considered small but which households interviewed said played a critical role in buying food as well as meeting other needs such as animal feeds, school uniforms, school levies and medical care.

3.1.2 Humanitarian-led CTP

The NDMA's harmonised household register for the HSNP has been crucial for a quick response as it is used by aid actors to target beneficiaries. Although the register is considered by many as outdated, as it has been in place since 2012; in interviews agencies mentioned using it for verification in the communities where they implement their activities, and how it acts as starting point for identifying most affected households. Agencies such as Oxfam and Save the Children can save on logistics costs by using the HSNP/Equity bank-issued ATM cards for the cash transfers.

“ The idea was that we used the standard amount for HSNP, because it's simple, easy to understand. It doesn't create any differences between the routine beneficiaries and the scale-up beneficiaries and everyone knows that's an HSNP payment. Of course, the HSNP payment is a household payment, whether there's one person, or 12 people in the household, it's the same amount. That's clearly unfair. ”

HSNP worker

Most NGOs working in CTP mentioned using the HSNP's database to target their beneficiaries, thus assisting the people who have not benefited from the HSNP's disbursements. They also mentioned providing feedback to the HSNP for them to update the database.

Donors advocate for vertical scalability of disbursement, rather than only horizontal scalability as has been done by the HSNP up until now; they consider the help provided per household is far from sufficient in a crisis situation such as the current drought. In addition, aid actors and the Cash Learning Partnership regional office in East Africa recommend assessing the amount of disbursement according to the price of the food basket, which is not the current practice.

3.2 Struggles over refugees' situations

While most stakeholders praised the way that Kenya's national and county government have led the humanitarian response to the 2017 drought, concerns were raised about humanitarian agencies' struggles to cooperate with the government over the resettlements of refugees.¹⁴

Donors and aid actors mentioned that they had tried to advocate for improvements in the refugees' situation in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps. They voiced concerns about fraud and registration issues, and sought to influence the content of the future Refugee Bill. It was unacceptable for them to let the government close Dadaab with a view to returning the Somalian refugees to a country still at war.

The Refugee Bill 2016 is seen as major step towards durable solutions as far as refugees are concerned. It offers prospects for citizenship and the right to education, employment and land (for purposes of cultivation and pasturing), thus transforming refugee management in the country. The Refugee Act of 2006 is being reviewed to ensure conformity with the Constitution and Kenya's international obligations. This offers new hope for refugees' right of movement and their opportunity to earn a decent living.

The Refugee Bill had its third and final reading in Parliament on 13 June 2017. This largely means that the National Assembly supports the bill. However, Parliament went on recess before the president approved it to law. It has since been overshadowed by elections, and its future hangs in the balance given the political situation in the country. Experts and practitioners on refugee matters during interviews argued that the political situation may have negative effects, with a new government possibly sending the bill back to the house.

3.3 Election year impact on drought

The second election under the new Constitution was scheduled for August 2017 to elect the president, members of parliament and devolved governments. In the event, the presidential election was then re-scheduled for October. This meant that much of 2017 was a political campaign year in Kenya, coinciding with the ongoing drought. There was a general feeling that the elections largely overshadowed the drought and the humanitarian situation. The Kenyan population outside the ASAL areas was not necessarily aware that a crisis was unfolding in their country, which meant they were not mobilised about it. Unlike the 2011 drought that drew public outcry and then a public response under the K4K initiative (Muli, n.d.), broad public awareness of the crisis appears to have been absent. In other cases, the drought and/or response measures were used for political ends.

“ If it wasn’t an election year, maybe the media houses would be talking about the drought, but they are just talking elections only. ”

International organisation representative

Humanitarian stakeholders and donors were cautious not to push the government to take action in spite of concerns about delays in declaring the emergency and about making funds available for the crisis. Visas for international humanitarian staff became more difficult to obtain a year before the elections, which may have hindered some INGO work in the country. Aid actors also mentioned allocating time and resources for contingency planning in fear of possible election-related violence.¹⁵

International donors and aid actors’ objectives were in line with those set by the government for responding to the 2017 drought situation in northern Kenya. They participated in the coordination meetings and steering groups organised at county and national government levels, benefited from information-sharing, monitoring activities and data provided by national agencies such as the NDMA. Joint implementation activities were sometimes organised: OXFAM in Turkana, for instance, regularly works with the county government (rehabilitating wells, for instance).

3.4 Concerns over accountability and engagement

A number of aid actors mention concerns about the limited ways in which the population can influence decisions about the help they receive. Some NGOs have very strong community-based approaches and apply these in the Kenyan context as they do elsewhere in the world. However other actors, with methods that are perhaps less participatory, tend to do their programming without sufficient needs-based analysis, mostly by selecting their beneficiaries from the HSNP household list, which is outdated.

“ There is a Uwajibikaji Pamoja platform, which means Accountability Together, where communities are able to feed back, through SMS [and] through staff, if you are there. ” We started this two years [ago] now. I wouldn’t say that it’s working brilliantly.

Humanitarian worker from an INGO

Doubts were also expressed about the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. A variety of complaints mechanisms and feedback systems were used in the response, but most of the people interviewed doubted whether these were really functioning due to the variety of forms that they take (from the simple complaints box to an SMS or email system), which creates confusion.

In addition, there were concerns about cases of cash assistance not reaching the beneficiaries (for suspected reasons of exclusion, corruption and diversion), but these have not been systematically addressed.

More broadly, donors consider their long-term investment in state system strengthening is fruitful though far from being completely satisfactory. Most international actors consider their role should be more indirect, no longer directly implementing but providing capacity development, contributing to state systems strengthening and progressively shifting their strategies to fit that approach. This includes maintaining a presence in order to strengthen local actors through continuous capacity development and strengthening state systems. INGOs may support staff at county and sub-county levels to enable them to perform their tasks competently and may support county and sub-county structures in optimising their organisational structures and internal processes.

4. Impact and conclusion

4.1 Positive effects of resilience programmes

This drought appears to be more severe than the 2011 drought (according to the Food and Agriculture Organization). Although it is difficult to measure and no firm data are available, it seems that resilience work has been effective to some extent, as the situation may have been worse without the disaster preparedness funding that donors injected into the country since the last severe drought. In fact, donors were on the verge of stopping emergency funding to the country in 2017 before the situation deteriorated.

The NDMA seemed to play a positive role in relation to preparedness: it was observed that in the 23 counties where the NDMA operates, disaster preparedness (especially concerning drought) was much better coordinated than the other 24 counties where it does not (Development Initiatives, 2017a).

“ Under [the] ECHO-funded project, we have been running our project on disaster preparedness, and resilience building, with also emergency in between. And the major interventions we've done over these five, now six years, was to train communities on how to identify, analyse and plan for the risks that they have. And we narrowed it down to drought management. So, the communities we worked with across the five counties have been working on what they call the contingency plans. They develop their risks, they develop their disaster, ... and then the contingency plans. These contingency plans have been used by these communities to look for resources, to address some of the critical things they have in their plans, which we may not even fund, and this we have seen – for example, some of them, taking these contingency plans to the county government, and getting some funds to, for example, improve a water point, improve a school, improve a health centre, or take it to look for another donor who can completely do some development. And this was done, being done in preparation, or in preparedness, [for] the looming drought, or any other form of disaster. ”

Humanitarian worker

4.2 Monitoring the political situation

The 2017 elections in Kenya affected the humanitarian response and more generally have had a slowing effect on economic activities. Tensions related to electoral activities have also affected typical livelihood activities, particularly for vulnerable communities, by impeding their access to food and income sources.

As such, humanitarian interventions in pastoral and marginal agricultural areas were affected, as humanitarian actors had to temporarily suspend their activities until after the elections.

Generally, the elections were characterised by political uncertainty, tension and demonstrations – producing great economic uncertainty. Some organisations factored this context into their activities, preparing relief supplies to be deployed in the event that market failures and disruption would ensue.

“ At the end of the day, is it one country? The answer is no. ”

Humanitarian worker in the ASAL area

Food availability was restricted in remote, rural areas as market operations slowed down and most organisations reduced deliveries of humanitarian assistance. To some extent, the drought was used by both the incumbents and the opposition as an electioneering ploy. The announcement of a maize (corn) subsidy in May 2017 was framed as a way to ease the rising staple food pressure caused by the drought.

4.3 Long-term vision

As part of the Kenya Vision 2030 second Medium Term Plan 2013–2017,¹⁶ the Ending Drought Emergencies initiative recognises that the main reason why droughts cause emergencies is the lack of critical foundations for development (i.e. security, climate-proof infrastructure and human capital such as education, health and nutrition) that would support livelihoods in drought-risk areas.

The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)¹⁷ shows that in Kenya drought cycles currently occur every two to three years instead of every five to seven years. This means that farming, agro-pastoralist and pastoralist livelihoods are under continuous threat with people’s capacity to cope increasingly weakened. Communities only have limited time to recover from previous droughts, increasing their vulnerability.

International and national aid actors have a common goal to further improve the link between relief, rehabilitation and development activities. This is to be achieved by encouraging more systematic risk analysis, early warning, contingency planning, standard operating procedures, skills-building and partnerships, and enhancing resilience throughout Kenya, mostly the northern parts, with the promotion of drought-resilient agriculture and rural development with a view to achieving food security. The Ending Drought Emergencies initiative seeks to prioritise these foundations, building resilience and strengthening the institutional and financing framework that is crucial for drought risk management and response, in the hope that this leads to sustainable livelihoods.

“ The long-term strategy, if I have to summarise in one sentence, is actually to keep and strengthen further ... our capacity for the emergency response, irrespective of the kind of disaster, manmade or natural, and to ... continue with the process and make as much as possible of the improvement, in terms of the capacities of the national society. ”

UN Programme Manager for Kenya

The response to the 2016–2017 episode of drought in Kenya faced numerous obstacles. Delayed humanitarian funding, poor infrastructure, geographic distances and security threats prevented assistance from reaching its targets and made coverage a real challenge in some remote areas, which were left behind. The positive role of the government in leading the response and implementing different Hunger Safety Net Programmes could not make up for the chronic lack of investment that has affected Kenya’s pastoral areas. Climate change may be behind the increased frequency of drought episodes, but poverty, under-development and a history of neglect and inequity are also to blame for their impact.

Endnotes

1. If necessary, crisis modifiers include flexible programming and funding components which can be activated in a crisis situation.
2. Dadaab now hosts approximately 260,000 people as the Kenyan government intended to close the camp in 2016. Some refugees returned to their countries, some were moved to other camps in Kenya (Kakuma, Nairobi).
3. In April 2018, UNHCR reported that 78,847 people had returned to their country of origin (75,659 from Dadaab, 65 from Nairobi and 3,123 from Kakuma).
4. Article 43 of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, which cites:
 43. (1) Every person has the right—
 - (a) to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care;
 - (b) to accessible and adequate housing, and to reasonable standards of sanitation;
 - (c) to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality;
 - (d) to clean and safe water in adequate quantities;
 - (e) to social security; and
 - (f) to education.
 - (2) A person shall not be denied emergency medical treatment.
 - (3) The State shall provide appropriate social security to persons who are unable to support themselves and their dependants. See: <http://www.kenyalaw.org/lex/actview.xql?actid=Const2010>
5. Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) drought phases are: Phase 1 – Minimal; Phase 2 – Stressed; Phase 3 – Crisis; Phase 4 – Emergency; Phase 5 - Famine (<http://fews.net/IPC>).
6. For details of the Flash Appeal, see OCHA, 2017d. (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Kenyan_Flash_%20Appeal_15%20March%202017%20final.pdf)
7. The HSNP made emergency cash transfers to an additional 26,482 households in response to the current drought.
8. See endnote 1.
9. The Kenya Cash Working Group has been established since this research occurred. It brings together actors working in Kenya. It is chaired by the NDMA and co-chaired by the Kenya Red Cross Society.
10. Including the 3.4 million people who were food-insecure.
11. Global Acute Malnutrition, Severe Acute Malnutrition and Moderate Acute Malnutrition
12. The health sector has been affected by a long nurses' strike over pay since June 2017.
13. See: <http://www.hsnp.or.ke/>
14. It should be observed that no one from UNHCR was interviewed during this case study.
15. This occurred during elections in 2007–2008 when 1,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced.
16. This borrows heavily from lessons learnt in the 2008–2011 drought as identified in the Kenya Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). For more details see Republic of Kenya, 2012.
17. See: http://www.gfdrr.org/sites/gfdrr/files/Kenya_PDNA_Final.pdf

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