22 March 2017 - The Ministry of Health in Somalia, with support from WHO, deployed a technical team to assess the magnitude and challenges of the cholera outbreak in Bay region, and provide technical assistance to scale up the response. The team visited 3 cholera treatment centres (CTCs) and 9 cholera treatment units (CTUs) in Baidoa and surrounding villages. While the treatment facilities receive support from health cluster partners, none of them have adequate water and sanitation facilities.

The technical team found that the key drivers for the rise in cholera cases were lack of water, food insecurity and poor case management skills.

Since the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Health in Somalia has reported over 13 000 cholera cases and 343 deaths in 12 regions. The number of cases is almost five times more than what was experienced during the same period in 2016.

Of the reported cases, over 6000 cases and 104 deaths have been reported in Bay region alone, and nearly 90% of these cases come from inaccessible areas outside Baidoa town. To address this, the Somali National Drought Committee, with the Ministry of Health and WHO, has deployed around 20 volunteer doctors to some of these inaccessible areas. The doctors were provided with critical training in cholera case management at Banadir Hospital in Mogadishu prior to deployment.

Additionally, WHO has provided on-the-job training for over 20 health workers in the region on case management, surveillance, and infection control and prevention.
Several CTUs have been established in areas outside Baidoa, where they can be accessed by people who are unable to travel to Baidoa. However, more health workers who are trained in cholera case management are needed for these treatment facilities to be effective.

It was also found that CTCs need more medical supplies due to the increased number of cases. While WHO has delivered much-needed emergency medical supplies and equipment to the hard-hit areas, more will be needed if the number of cases continue to increase.

WHO will support the cholera response efforts with additional on-the-job training for health workers, provision of laboratory equipment for testing cholera samples and the deployment of emergency response personnel for managing logistics, case management, surveillance activities, coordination and other key operational functions.

WHO continues to work closely with the National Drought Committee and the UN Drought Operations Centre in their ongoing response efforts along with UN health and WASH partners. Additionally, NGOs and private donors, who have been eager to support the drought response with medical supplies have been given guidance on what supplies would be beneficial for CTCs.

In order to fortify the ongoing drought and cholera response efforts, the Health cluster in Somalia is looking to donors for US$ 85 million in funding support, of which WHO requires funds of US$ 13 million. Humanitarian aid is needed for over 6.2 million people in the country, including 3 million who face food shortages. Drought conditions have raised the risk of contracting waterborne diseases for nearly 5.5 million people, more than half of whom are women and children under 5 years of age.