

17 July 2022 – In 2021, Somalia barely had time to take its eye off the COVID-19 pandemic, when the ongoing severe drought crept up. As a result, many Somali communities, over 40% of whom are known to live rural and nomadic lifestyles, lost their livestock and crops.



Health Cluster Coordinator for Somalia Ms Erna-Roelofje Christina Van Goor visits a hospital in Dhushamareb to view health services being offered, Galgaduud, June 2022. Credit: WHO Somalia/Fouzia Bano To deliver a multifaceted response to the ongoing drought, Somalia's Health Cluster has been working hand in hand with international and national health agencies in the country.

Delivering a joint response with partners

Led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Health Cluster convened regular meetings with partners, including the federal and state ministries of health, where the Organization shared updates on the drought situation and the anticipated public health impacts. These meetings offered partners a platform to discuss their response activities related to the drought, in addition to gaps and challenges.

The Health Cluster has also been participating in inter-cluster platforms. Led by the United

Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), stakeholders' inter-cluster response for drought entailed the reconstitution of the Drought Operations Coordination Centre. The Health Cluster is playing a key role in coordinating the overall health response in the country and working hand in hand with the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition clusters for programmatic integrations.

Health Cluster partners have so far benefited from 2 rounds of Somalia Humanitarian Fund allocations, that amounted to approximately US \$9 million to respond to the drought, targeting the most severely affected populations. These allocations have taken advantage of the cross-cluster collaboration, with most funding channeled to integrated health, nutrition and WASH projects.

Visiting the most hard-hit drought-affected areas



The Health Cluster serves as a coordinating body for health actors across Somalia to ensure the most vulnerable people have access to health services, Istanbul internally displaced persons camp, Jubaland, May 2022. Credit: WHO Somalia/Arete The Health Cluster participated in inter-cluster caravan missions to various drought-affected areas to assess the health situation, identify gaps and opportunities for support. The areas visited include Bardhere, Luuq and Elwak in Gedo region, Garowe, Hargeisa and Jowhar, among other areas severely affected by the drought. From these missions, the Cluster observed the high prevalence of waterborne disease outbreaks, mainly due to a lack of sufficient clean water and hygiene services.

Suspected measles cases were also observed in most areas, including in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), where families complained about rashes and high-grade symptoms. The team noted large numbers of people suffering from malnutrition, which is known to be a key contributing factor in susceptibility to diseases, especially among children under 5.

Mental health and gender-based violence risks during drought

Mental health and psychosocial support services remain a key gap in internally displaced persons camps, with children showing signs of trauma and depression, as noted by the Cluster. The emotional impact of changes to family and community life appears to have affected children's lives in the camps at alarming rates. Interaction with women in the camps revealed high cases of gender-based violence, mostly attributed to the lack of shelter as most newly arrived women and girls sleep outdoors.

As a result of these missions and observations made, funding allocation has been better prioritized to reach the most vulnerable populations in these severely affected areas. An integrated approach to the response to drought has been noted as the most effective and efficient way of providing assistance. These caravan missions have also provided an opportunity to monitor partners' interventions related to health. However, as the agencies struggle to step up effective drought response, the needs of the underserved communities are clearly outpacing the available services.

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