



THE BHA PROJECT



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Background Information

Integrated Lifesaving Assistance to Crisis-Affected Populations in Wajir and Garissa Counties



Drought is a recurrent natural disaster that poses significant challenges to communities worldwide, affecting their livelihoods, food security, and overall well-being. In Kenya, the counties of Wajir and Garissa have been particularly susceptible to drought conditions, exacerbating the already precarious situation for the vulnerable population.

Multiple shocks in Garissa and Wajir in 2019/2020 have contributed to increasing vulnerability in these two counties, with pastoralists and agro-pastoralists – who constitute 70% of the population – being among the worst affected households. Garissa and Wajir were among the

first counties to be invaded by desert locust swarms in early 2020, causing localized destruction of grazing lands and crops planted on small-scale farms. Another wave of desert locust invasions occurred in Garissa and Wajir in December 2020, further affecting grazing land and

Wajir and Garissa County in northeastern Kenya are characterized by arid and semi-arid climatic conditions. The region experiences minimal and erratic rainfall, making it highly susceptible to drought.



To address the water scarcity issue, Save the Children constructed boreholes, water storage facilities, and water points strategically located within communities, ensuring a sustainable supply of clean water.

small-scale crop production. An assessment conducted in January 2021 by the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) to determine the impacts of the October-December 2020 desert locust invasions found that 40% of residents interviewed in the two counties experienced high or very high crop losses while 28% had high or very high range land losses, particularly in Wajir County.

At the same time as the above, measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19, such as movement restrictions and curfews, compounded already-significant impacts on food security, nutritional status, and economic status at the household level. These measures have led to loss of livelihoods, disruptions to supply chains limiting access to food, reductions in total area under crop production, as well as added challenges to sale and storage of milk. With the pandemic ongoing, poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa expected to rise by 23% ([fpri.org/blog/poverty-and-food-insecurity](https://www.fpri.org/blog/poverty-and-food-insecurity)) in 2021, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warning that new immature locust swarms have been spotted in Wajir and Garissa this month, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) is expected to increase in the targeted counties.



In October 2020, SC conducted a Household Economy Outcome Analysis (HEA) in Turkana, Wajir, and Mandera to determine household deficits following the COVID-19 restrictions and other shocks that have affected the communities such as floods and locust invasions. The analysis indicated that very poor agro-pastoral households have been heavily affected by the shocks and are facing survival deficits. This is likely to get worse in 2021 as the March-May long rains are predicted by Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Climate Prediction Center (NOAA/CPC) to be below normal, following the failed October-December 2020 short rains. Based on the HEA findings, 79,932 persons will be facing survival deficits in Wajir from January-June 2021.

Agriculture: The recent cycle of natural hazards (floods, locust invasion) in addition to COVID-19 resulted in less than the long-term average food and livestock production in Garissa and Wajir in 2020. In Wajir County, the area planted with maize crop, sorghum and cow peas reduced by 40%, 4% and 33% respectively; actual production for maize and sorghum was 61% below the long-term average while cow peas was 63% below. Livestock productivity is projected to deteriorate due to the decline in available feeds and reduction in access to water as the 2020 short rains were below average and 2021 long rains are projected to be below average. This will lead to a reduction in milk production and consumption at the household level which could lead to a reduction in livestock prices, consequently compromising the

nutrition status of children under-five. In Garissa County, the areas most affected by floods include Fafi, Hulugho and Balambala sub-counties, where crops in farms along the rivers were swept away and harvesting was hampered due to inaccessibility. Livestock prices are projected to decline as livestock body conditions deteriorate, again due to lack of available feeds. This will all complicate the food security situation for a majority of households. Food commodity prices are expected to increase, affecting poor households' purchasing power and food access. According to the LRA, household food stocks in the two counties are expected to be depleted within 3-4 months. Crisis coping strategies employed by households are expected to increase with expected continued loss of labor due to COVID-19 and from the decline





of crop production at both the household and regional level. Acute food insecurity will increase and more households are likely to slide into Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

An estimated 531,005 children (6-59 months) and 98,390 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) require immediate treatment for acute malnutrition in Kenya. Prior to COVID-19, an estimated 135,509 out of these 531,005 children had severe wasting. Both Wajir and Garissa contribute 12,882 and 48,207 severely malnourished and moderately malnourished children respectively to the national burden. The nutrition situation in these two counties is projected to remain at critical levels according to the integrated acute malnutrition phase classification (IPC-AMN), at Phase 4. While this can be largely attributed to household food insecurity resulting from the cumulative effects of recurrent shocks and COVID-19, poor infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices and childhood illnesses have

exacerbated the malnutrition situation. While the Ministry of Health (MoH) has recently revised and updated the national Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) guidelines to include management of children 0-6 months suffering from acute malnutrition, the existing capacity and MoH systems are not designed to provide continuum of care for the mother and baby pair. Anthropometry alone is not sufficient to identify “at-risk” infants and mothers of acute malnutrition. Furthermore, the two separate treatment streams for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) using different treatment commodities with separate supply chains has contributed to low access to treatment due to frequent supply chain breaks for therapeutic feeds, especially Ready-to-Use Supplementary Feeds (RUSF) for treating MAM. Existing WASH services in the two counties are weak and insufficient. Garissa County is water scarce with only 23.8% of the

population having access to safe water. 50.63% of the population uses other means of sanitation such as open defecation. In Wajir County, the latrine coverage is approximately 30%. This has often led to the spread of diseases such as Cholera, further impacting the nutrition situation. The main sources of water in the two counties include underground water from boreholes, shallow wells, pans and dams as well as seasonal rivers, which are affected by frequent droughts and below average rainfall. Below average rainfall in the October-December 2020 short rain season exacerbated the situation. The National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) observes that the few water pans moderately recharged by short rains in Wajir North, Wajir South, and East are now drying up, leading to high concentrations of livestock and human in functional boreholes, while in Garissa water pans and boreholes are drying up faster than anticipated with the onset of the dry season in January 2021.

Pressure on remaining boreholes will lead to contamination, resulting in outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as Cholera, while hygiene behavior is likely to shift as the community prioritizes water for drinking at the expense of washing hands and other essential hygiene actions. Already we are seeing households in these two counties needing to travel farther for water, with December data indicating that return distance to water sources in Wajir recording an increase to 14.6km compared to the normal

average of 5km, while in Garissa the distance increased to 20.8km compared to the normal average of 14.05km. In this context, women and girls face increased exposure to protection risks given that they are typically responsible for the collection of water and are vulnerable when walking significant distances to access water points. Poor access to water, combined with a lack of sanitation facilities and poor hygiene behavior, will contribute to high rates of morbidity and mortality amongst the target

population. Multiple risks are reduced through increased access to WASH services in close proximity to households.

This project was coordinated through the County Steering Group (CSG), the main platform through which coordination of humanitarian actions are handled. Thematic platforms such as the County Nutrition Technical Forum, and WESCORD will play a key





Community Health Outreaches

Helping Malnourished Children



Multiple shocks driven by climate crisis have contributed to increasing vulnerability in the northern Kenya counties with pastoralists being among the worst affected households.

"I heard about the community health outreach programs through a neighbor and decided to take my children. Their health has since improved because they are given plumpy nuts to help boost their immunity."

In Wajir County, the rotting carcasses of cows, sheep, and goats lie in various stages of decomposition.

The bodies of animals keep increasing every day, festering in the scorching sun. We meet a lone camel walking in the dusty streets, about to collapse in the soaring heat.

While drought is relatively common in North Eastern, Kenya, the current drought is one of the worst to be experienced in recent years. Pastoralists are more vulnerable to the drought because they live in harsher lands which experience little to no rainfall yearly.

On a recent trip to Wajir County, we met 20-year-old Siada Adan, a married mother of three and a resident of Garse Ake, Buna Sub-County; grazing her cattle in the bushes. Siada informed us that the drought crisis has really affected the lives of residents in her village. She says several people have lost their livestock, which, for many pastoralists in Northern Kenya, is their main source of livelihood. As a result, many others are surviving on only one meal, if at all any, a day. This has had adverse effects on the residents, but most especially children and expectant and lactating mothers.

Siada and her children have not been spared. "It is now about two years

since the drought started. There are no vegetables in this town. We neither have milk nor food to give our children, so they end up becoming weak and malnourished," she says. She tells us that her children were on the brink of malnutrition until she heard about the outreach programs by Save the Children.

"My children were really weak and had become very thin. I heard about the community health outreach programs through a neighbor and decided to take my children. Their health has since improved because they are given plumpy nuts to help boost their immunity," Siada narrates to us.

Together with the Ministry of Health and the County Government of Wajir, we conduct outreach programs every two weeks in different areas in the county.

We provide services like vaccination, vitamin supplements, care for lactating and expectant mothers, training on how to take care of children among others "I want my children to be in good health

and grow well. I want them to go to school and study well so that they can become doctors, nurses or teachers. I want them to study well so that they can help me also," a hopeful Siada concludes .

According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), the effects of a third consecutive below-average rainy season are resulting to deteriorating food security outcomes driven by the impacts of poor crop and livestock production, resource-based conflict, livestock disease and mortality, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In its annual Short Rains Assessment report released in February 2022, the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) reported that there are around 3.1 million food-insecure people in pastoral and marginal agricultural areas, a 48 percent increase since August 2021. Multiple shocks driven by climate crisis have contributed to increasing vulnerability in the northern Kenya counties with pastoralists being among the worst affected households.





Food Security and Livelihoods

From a Pastoralist to a Farmer



"The money I got from selling the farm produce is what ocially started my life. I used it to buy land, goats and even cattle. I am also able to buy food and provide a balanced diet for my family. I am happy because my children are very healthy as a result,"

*From pastopralist to a farmer.
Story of muhamed Muhamed.*

Globally, drought ranks first among all natural hazards when measured by the total number of people impacted, while at the same time drought is the most complex but least understood of all natural hazard. Part of this complexity is due to the fact that the impacts of drought are not evenly distributed across the landscape or among human populations. Every individual may be impacted differently

On a typical day, 40-year-old Muhumed Mohamed works on his farm from morning to midday. Muhumed, a resident of Fafe Constituency, Bura-East Sub-County, Garissa County, is a husband and father of five children aged 3-7 years. We find him sprinkling some water in his nursery; something you wouldn't expect in a County like Garissa, which has been severely affected by the ongoing drought crisis in Northern Kenya.

He tells us he has not always been a farmer. He was once a pastoralist, but when all his animals died because of the drought, he was forced to turn to farming to survive. He confesses to us that when he started, he knew nothing about it. "I had no experience in farming or setting up a nursery. I also did not know if a seed was good or bad, or how to use herbicides to control diseases," Muhumed tells



I am happy because my children are very healthy as a result.

"Save the Children took me and several others through a training program on best farming practices and how to control crop diseases. We were then given three varieties of vegetable seeds (jute mallow, amaranths, watermelon) and 3 staple crops (beans, maize, sorghum), farm tools (hoes, spades, forksracks, machetes, watering cans), and hermetic storage bags for post-harvest handling

practices, to help us start our farming," says Muhumed.

Now Muhumed is a happy and successful farmer. He tells us that he used the money he got from selling farm produce to buy a piece of land where he has constructed rentals for business owners. He also has a shop and can now afford to take his children to school and pay their fees.

"The money I got from selling the farm produce is what socially started my life. I used it to buy land, goats and even cattle. I am also able to buy food and provide a balanced diet for my family.

I am happy because my children are very healthy as a result," says Muhumed. "This field has uplifted my life and the lives of all my children."



Cash Transfer Program

I'm grateful to Save the Children



During one of our walks in one of the villages in Wajir County, we have the pleasure of encountering Dienab Hujaje from Tula Village. In a round hut of woven sticks, she serves tea to her children, the neighbors' children, and other visitors.

Beneficiaries of the Cash Transfer programme received cash grants of more than Ksh. 5,500 for three months of the CTP program implementation.

With the drought, animal products, such as milk and meat, have become scarce. Children, elderly and expectant and lactating women Wajir have been suffering from malnutrition.



Hujaje expresses concern about the impact of the drought and locust infestation on her family of 10, including seven children and two elderly relatives.

“The ravaging drought has led to the death of our animals and scarcity in animal products. This time it is worse because during the locust infestation we used chemical sprays in an attempt to drive them away. This led to the death of some animals,” she explains

Hujaje’s family members are

particularly vulnerable to the drought as they do not work to earn a salary or receive support from the government. Instead, they feed on and make money from animal products. But with the drought, animal products, such as milk and meat, have become scarce. She tells us that many children, elderly and expectant and lactating women in the village have been suffering from malnutrition.

Before the drought, Hujaje’s family would eat three meals a day; but once the crisis hit their village, food became a luxury.

On a good day, they would eat one meal a day. In addition, two of her sons were not going to school because she could not afford to pay their fees.

But all this changed when Save the Children introduced the Cash Transfer Programme (CTP) Beneficiaries of the programme received cash grants of more than Ksh. 5,500 which has cumulatively added up to an estimated amount of Ksh. 17,000 during the three months of the CTP program implementation.



The CT program helped a majority of the population in Wajir and Garissa



“Everyone has, at least, benefited. Both young and old. Up to 90% of the cash grants received were spent on water, food, and school fees payments. We managed to eat at least two meals a day during the three months that we received support through the CTP. As a committee member, people keep asking me several times about the return of the CTP,” Hujaje says.

The three months of the CTP program also helped Hujaje save

and invest money for her family. “Because I am a single mother, and I don’t want to spend all the cash that I received on food items, I have decided to get a tangible resource out of the cash grants by buying a goat. The goat will produce offspring and will multiply quickly, supplying us with the milk required for the nutrition and growth of children,” she says.

Hujaje is hopeful that her

children will have a good life like the one she had when growing up.

“During my earlier stages of growth in the countryside, life was much more –enjoyable than it is today. I am, therefore, hopeful that my children will enjoy a better life than mine and pursue careers that will see them become doctors, pilots, or teachers.”

Hujaje hopes that the programme length will be extended.



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