

15 essential lessons for humanitarian responders in Somalia

The humanitarian crisis in Somalia continues to deteriorate. **Five consecutive failed rainy seasons have produced the worst drought in 40 years.** A sixth season of below-average rainfall is expected from March to June 2023.

By June 2023, 727,000 people could face catastrophic hunger levels, and over 8 million could be food insecure. In addition, 1.8 million children under the age of 5 are projected to be acutely malnourished and over 500,000 severely malnourished between August and July 2023.

Drought-induced severe water shortages are increasing risks of cholera outbreaks and acute watery diarrhoea. **Conflict and insecurity exacerbate drought vulnerability**, in turn worsening displacement as people search for food, water, pasture and other services.

This briefing summarises ALNAP's synthesis of lessons learned from evaluations and learnings from previous drought responses in Somalia. It provides essential lessons for the current Somalia drought response - more detail on applying the lessons, including good practice examples, can be found here. The themes were selected based on interviews with frontline staff discussing key learning challenges.

Applying these lessons to ensure that humanitarians learn effectively from previous responses requires that the right financing is in place. Many of the lessons speak to strengthening the quality of humanitarian response, which can help to end severe need more quickly and support sustainable pathways to recovery. **At the moment of publication, the UN-coordinated appeal for Somalia is only 23.5% funded.** As seen in wider ALNAP research, cuts in funding force agencies to make crucial trade-offs in quality, while also placing strain on social cohesion between those who receive support and those who are cut from distribution lists. In short, funding shortages have significant programmatic impacts that make it difficult to apply lessons learned and can affect the overall quality and effectiveness of the response. **The global community and humanitarian system still have the opportunity to avert a wider catastrophe in Somalia but only if adequate funding is provided to heed previous lessons and avoid repeating previous mistakes.**

Each lesson below is linked to a respective and more detailed version online, part of our learning piece '15 lessons for humanitarians responding to the Somalia crisis: Moving from response to prevention'.

Lesson 1: Deliver an integrated response by including WASH, health and protection measures alongside food security and nutrition

- Supply clean drinking water, for example, by deepening existing wells and digging boreholes. Boreholes can reduce water-borne disease incidence, while shallow wells can increase it.
- Accompany the provision of hygiene and sanitation facilities with WASH education and awareness.
- Vaccinate children against communicable diseases, especially measles.
- Plan to respond to acute watery diarrhoea through surveillance and having fast action teams.

- Establish community-based malnutrition management and have steady supply of ready-to-use therapeutic meals to treat acute malnutrition.
- Mainstream protection considerations, for example, by considering vulnerable groups in all targeting processes and making registration and distribution centres safe and inclusive.

Lesson 2: Pay attention to the current Somali context when using multi-purpose cash (MPC) to ensure effectiveness and efficiency

- Constantly monitor local supply chains to identify potential disruptions.
- Ensure quality relationships with financial service providers.
- Contact the Cash Working Group in Somalia to coordinate with other agencies providing MPC.

Lesson 3: Take marginalisation into account when targeting

- Carefully analyse the causes of vulnerabilities and who is most likely to be vulnerable.
- Pay sufficient attention to IPC classification 2.
- Map minority rights organisations to identify aid diversion and exclusion.
- Consider the severity of needs in prioritisation.
- Consider elements of gender– engage women in planning and decision-making and train staff in gender mainstreaming.

Lesson 4: Address health risks within IDP camps

- Establish safe sanitation and waste disposal facilities.
- Provide safe water (for example, through water treatment) to prevent water-borne diseases.
- Vaccinate children against infectious diseases, especially measles.
- Conduct mass screening and treatment and provide insecticide treated mosquito nets to prevent malaria.
- Engage local community health workers to improve uptake and effectiveness.

Lesson 5: Improve social cohesion among IDPs and host communities

- Ensure that both host communities and IDPs are included during targeting.
- Dispel myths about displaced people– explain why helping them is morally and economically beneficial.
- Implement interventions to foster social cohesion, such as awareness raising and advocacy.

Lesson 6: Work to prevent secondary displacement and tenure insecurity.

- Collaborate with developmental and governmental actors to protect IDPs from forced evictions and secondary displacement.

Lesson 7: Address access challenges to prevent the displacement of already marginalised populations

- Build capacity to access hard-to-reach communities. This includes the ability to apply humanitarian principles in negotiating access.
- Develop staffs' legal and operational skills as they negotiate contexts in which armed groups are active.

Lesson 8: Invest in remote management

Remote management can transfer risk to local partners and hinder efficiency unless there is sufficient preparation and investment.

- Hire staff with remote or distance management skills.
- Conduct collaborative risk assessment with partners and identify their security requirements and management structures to avoid risk transfer.
- Plan for remote management during the design phase of a regular programme.

Lesson 9: Bring coordination mechanisms closer to the field

- For example, transition from Nairobi-based coordination to coordination centres in Mogadishu and hubs in Somali states.

Lesson 10: Work respectfully with national and local NGOs

- Ensure that local and national NGOs are involved in high-level discussions and decisions.

Lesson 11: Adapt livelihoods support to the changing climate

- Provide climate-smart agricultural assistance such as providing seeds and drilling boreholes for irrigation and domestic use.
- Support pastoralists to develop alternative livelihoods or strengthen pastoralism, for example through herd diversification and livestock insurance programmes.

Lesson 12: Invest in sustainable water supply and management systems

- Build sustainable water supply systems such as boreholes, rainwater harvesting systems, solar-powered pumps. These can be done alongside emergency water provision.
- Train water point managers and operators and ensure consistent maintenance.

Lesson 13: Work through and with communities' own networks

- Strengthen social systems such as by engaging communities in collecting and disseminating up-to-date information.
- Build capacities of local communities and entities through strengthening early warning systems, providing micro-grants and training.

Lesson 14: Work through and with formal social protection systems

- Invest in existing social protection systems to avoid creating new vulnerabilities.

Lesson 15: Support local markets

- Support can include grants to traders and market linkages.