

Kenyan ASAL counties face a looming disaster as drought intensifies

Joint statement by the ASAL Humanitarian Network

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Following yet another below-average long rain season between March and May 2021, food security in the Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) counties in Kenya is deteriorating quickly.

This is an alarming situation at the onset of the dry season, with over 2 million people¹ already experiencing food insecurity (IPC 3 and 4²) and numbers are expected to continue rising. **Immediate action is required to prevent further deterioration of food security and nutrition..**

The underperformance of the long rains means that pasture and browse conditions are below average for this time of year. The below-average conditions of pasture and browse have already affected the condition of livestock – and their condition is likely to worsen due to increasing distances to water and pasture and an anticipated increase in livestock diseases and livestock deaths. Distance to water sources has increased already to about 40% further than the June average, the recharge of open water sources is already at 30-45% below average and the cost of water in the pastoral livelihood zones has increased by 40%³. **Tensions and conflict over limited access to resources are increasing as pastoralist communities are moving in search of water and pasture, both within the traditionally negotiated areas or outside of these locations⁴.**

The below-average rain season has come at a challenging time where farmers and agro-pastoral households are still recovering from the damage caused by the desert locust invasions, especially in northern pastoral areas⁵.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation by restricting access to health and nutrition services, a slowdown in trade and losses of income and livelihoods due to measures put in place to control the spread of the virus. Between March and April 2021, Kenya came through a third wave, which was the fastest growing and the highest in number of people infected since the beginning of the pandemic. However, since the beginning of June, the COVID-19 positivity rates have started increasing again and a fourth wave of increased COVID infections is looming.

The locust, COVID-19 and drought crises come at a time when Kenya is grappling with a growing debt and fiscal crisis. While the Government continues to seek more loans to fulfil its short- and long-term commitments, debt repayments in FY 2021/22 already consume up to 70% of the revenue targets, with little remaining for other obligations⁶. Liquidity problems between March to June resulted in delayed Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) payments, directly affecting the most vulnerable. As the most vulnerable are further left behind, and with an impending food and nutrition crisis, this is not setting the country on the path to economic recovery anytime soon.

With the onset of drought on top of the existing crises in Kenya's ASAL counties, the ASAL Humanitarian Network (AHN) and partners (ACTED, Concern and Oxfam) have started early action responses, including cash transfers, complementing interventions by communities and counties. In an effort to scale up early action interventions, results from an AHN Drought Needs Assessment will become available by 31st of July, focusing on the ASAL counties most at risk, including: Baringo, Garissa, Isiolo, Mandera, Marsabit, Tana River, Samburu, Turkana, and Wajir.

¹ Food Security and Nutrition Working Group, Food Security and Nutrition May 2021 Update:

https://mcusercontent.com/9206ea93bb8c6f35f98cc8ccf/files/b5229e0d-1a4f-7020-8bdb-a67dfc693ad4/FSNWG_Statement_May_2021.05.pdf

² The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification differentiates between levels of severity of acute food insecurity, IPC 3 indicating crisis phase and IPC 4 indicating emergency phase.

³ NDMA Drought Situation Update, June 2021.

⁴ Increased tensions and conflict are witnessed along the border areas between Garissa – Isiolo, Wajir – Isiolo and Wajir – Marsabit.

⁵ As the low rainfall constrained reproduction for desert locusts, the current infestation levels are significantly lower compared to one year ago.

⁶ Deloitte (June 2021) Kenya Budget Highlights – Navigating new realities, p. 8.

The needs assessment will provide a snapshot on how the drought situation is progressing and will inform immediate interventions, before the more in-depth results from the Long Rains Assessment will become available.

As food security is rapidly deteriorating and once again unveiling systemic inequality, assistance to mitigate the impacts and act before it is too late is lagging behind. **The ASAL Humanitarian Network:**

- **Calls upon the national and county governments to release available funding** and to work in close cooperation with development and humanitarian partners.
- **Urges for mobilization of (no-regrets) anticipatory financing and early action** to protect affected households from the deepening impact of two consecutive poor rain seasons, in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic, and as households are still recovering from widespread desert locust infestations.
- **Recommends the adoption of Forecast Based Action** that combines water and food security indicators, urges the Water and Sanitation Coordination Group (WESCORD) to prioritize the incorporation of a water severity index, which sets in prior to food insecurity in ASAL context
- **Supports enhanced coordination to monitor the context and to reinforce an inclusive response effort**, including strong linkages between different ministries, integrating interventions across the development and humanitarian nexus and the reactivation of coordination at national, county and operational levels through County Steering Groups and sectoral working groups, including for cash, WASH, health and nutrition.
- **Calls for locally led responses** that are timely, and that sustains and reinforces existing community efforts.

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