

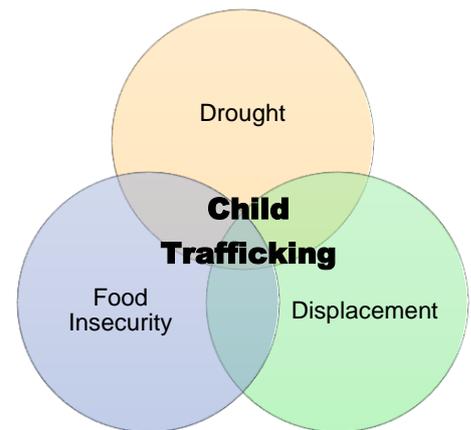
Unfolding the triple nexus: The impact of climate change and food insecurity on child trafficking in Somalia



Somalia is experiencing the worst climate induced emergency it has seen in 40 years causing catastrophic food insecurity. Four consecutive failed rainy seasons and the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic plunged the country into crisis. This situation has been exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its blockade of Ukraine's wheat exports disrupted the world's supply chain. The resulting price increases threaten to tip more families in Somalia over the edge. And the lowest levels of funding on record prevents the humanitarian community to respond as needed. UNICEF is appealing for US\$ 986 million to provide urgent life-saving and climate resilience support to 4.2 million people, half of them children, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia Eritrea, and Djibouti. Currently, there are two million children across the region in need of treatment for severe acute malnutrition.¹

Almost half the population of Somalia, 7 million people, do not have enough food, according to the UN². The UN estimates 1.5 million children under the age of five years are acutely malnourished and died over the last 12 months. The real number is likely much higher as the deaths of many children go unrecorded. At least 10 million children are suffering as four rainy seasons have failed in the space of two years drying up water sources and killing vast numbers of livestock and crops.

Human mobility is one of the coping mechanisms for food insecurity. Evidence³ suggests that children are more vulnerable to inadequate care, abuse, exploitation and neglect due to drought, widespread food insecurity and displacement. 'Children on the move', those who are unaccompanied, internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, are exposed to an array of risks during their journeys and on arrival at their destination, including forced labour, sexual abuse and exploitation, detention, physical and gender based-violence, lack of access to education and legal status, among others⁴. Many of these children fall victim to abusers, traffickers and smugglers, who often abandon them in the desert without food and water, or occasionally throw them overboard while crossing the sea; some die along the way due to dehydration. Smugglers and traffickers may also resort to extortion, demanding ransom from the families of migrant children under threat of beatings, sexual violence, and death. Even if the children survive their journey, these experiences are deeply traumatic for both the children and their families, who are compelled to sell assets and beg in desperation to pay the ransom, creating long-term economic consequences.



In 2022, CSOs in the Horn of Africa conducted a *Regional Mapping of Trafficking and Vulnerable Migrants' Routes*. The key findings identify economic stress and poverty as the main vulnerability factor to migrants. Data submitted by Somali CSOs in the 2021 report *Human Trafficking and Risky Migration Routes: Data insights from Somali Civil Society Organisations confirmed* the findings for Somalia. Minors in particular are especially at risk of the being trafficked as a result of economic stress. The CSOs' dataset includes a substantial number of submissions relating to the exploitation of children which indicates that minors make up most detected cases of victims of trafficking and abuse in the region. The report shows that children suffered a wide range of abuses from denial of food and drink, the giving of alcohol, physical, psychological and sexual abuse and threats.

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Another key finding from the report indicates that pull factors influencing the migration decision are marriage (often arranged by family members) and better concrete and potential education opportunities, as well as asylum and refuge. Displacement due to conflict and other issues are relevant push factors which leave affected populations in the region with little choice other than to migrate.

¹ 'Regional call to action - Horn of Africa drought crisis: climate change is here now', UNICEF, 19th July 2022 retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/regional-call-action-horn-africa-drought-crisis-climate-change-here-now-july-2022>

² 'Somalia: 'Dire and grim' drought, impacting more than 7 million', UN News, 1st June 2022 retrieved from <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/somalia-%E2%80%98dire-and-grim%E2%80%99-drought-impacting-more-7-million>

³ Evidence from the 2016/2017 drought in the Horn of Africa showed increased rates of GBV including sexual violence and child marriage as well as child protection concerns like child labour and family separation as communities struggled to survive ('Regional call to action - Horn of Africa drought crisis: climate change is here now', UNICEF, 19th July 2022 retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/regional-call-action-horn-africa-drought-crisis-climate-change-here-now-july-2022>)

⁴ 'African Migration Report: Challenging the Narrative, IOM, 2020

The drought in Somalia has resulted in massive displacement and children are at an increased exposure to risks of recruitment into armed forces and groups, sexual violence, separation from their families, psychosocial distress, trafficking and economic exploitation, increased vulnerability to harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), loss of education, and other forms of harm. It is no surprise that Al-Shabaab have learned to take advantage of drought induced displacements of children. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather disasters due to climate change such as floods, droughts are having a devastating effect on food security and the livelihoods in the region of those already living in poverty and marginalisation. These situations create circumstances where vulnerable children are at increased risk of violence and exploitation, including sexual and physical abuse, and trafficking during and after extreme weather events. These risks are heightened when collecting food, water and firewood or when staying in temporary shelters or refugee camps.

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In addition, family separation and the breakdown of national and community-based child protection systems make girls and boys especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and violence by Al-Shabaab. Many families are forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms for survival, such as leveraging their children into forced marriage, particularly adolescent girls, child labour and forced begging. Migration may make children vulnerable to being sold for forced labour and be sexually exploited since they typically lack financial resources, access to effective child protection and welfare systems.

We, as Somali CSOs working with vulnerable migrants including children, witness these effects on the ground. The Somali Humanitarian Organisation (SHO), for example, works in humanitarian emergency situations, post-emergency recovery, and reconstruction programs. They have programmes designed to increase knowledge and understanding of food security and livelihood support programs aimed at community sustainability in Somalia. SHO observed that the drought directly affected large numbers of children with adolescent mothers and female-headed families that are highly vulnerable to losing their lives due to lack of food and water access where they reside, increasing the chances of child exploitation by traffickers.

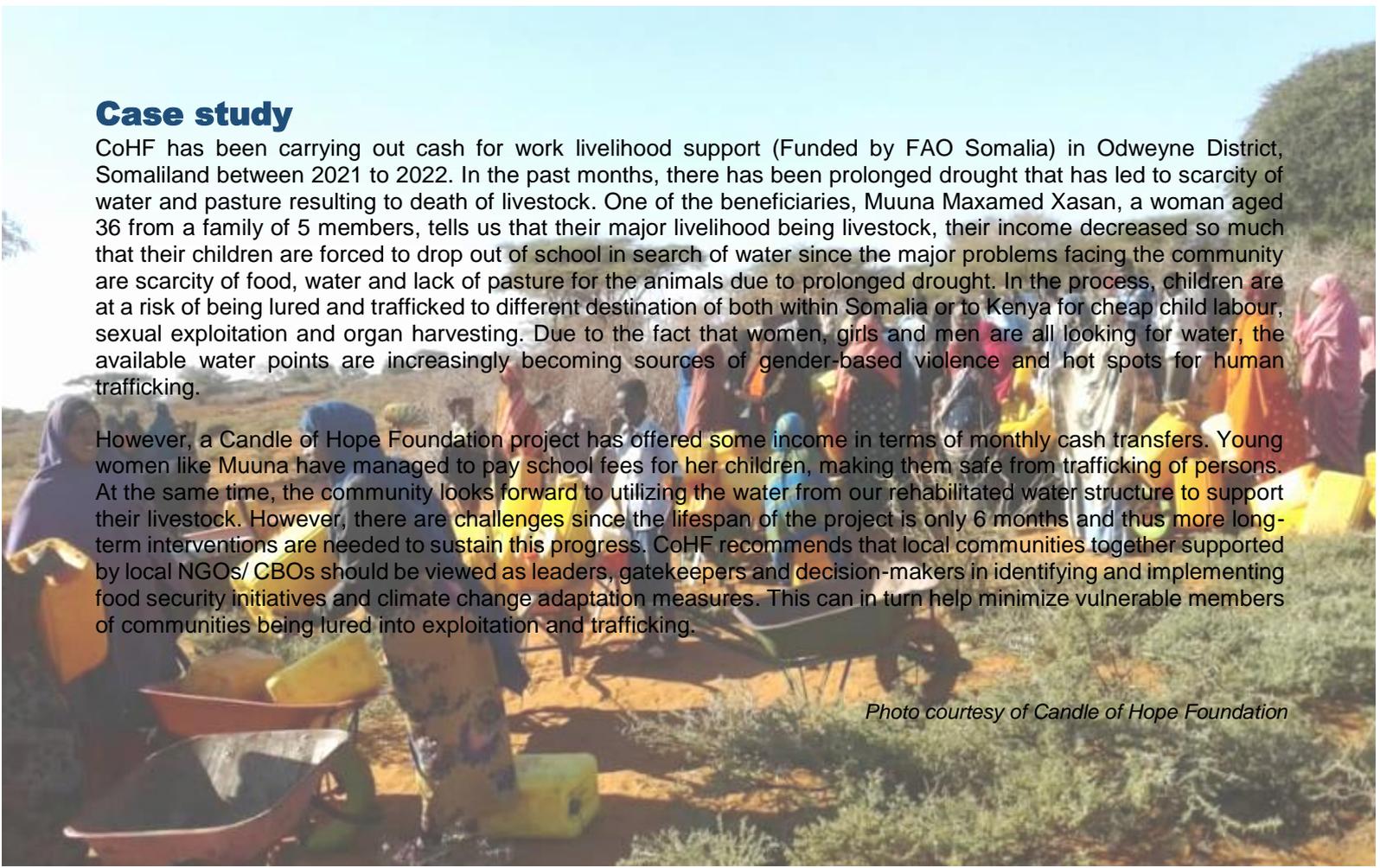
Addressing the vulnerability of children to trafficking in the context of the ongoing food insecurity crisis caused by drought is undoubtedly an immense challenge and remains to be fully explored. The international community cannot afford to overlook the climate change-child trafficking nexus if they are to deliver on their promise of Agenda 2030 to 'leave no one behind'.

Case study

CoHF has been carrying out cash for work livelihood support (Funded by FAO Somalia) in Odweyne District, Somaliland between 2021 to 2022. In the past months, there has been prolonged drought that has led to scarcity of water and pasture resulting to death of livestock. One of the beneficiaries, Muuna Maxamed Xasan, a woman aged 36 from a family of 5 members, tells us that their major livelihood being livestock, their income decreased so much that their children are forced to drop out of school in search of water since the major problems facing the community are scarcity of food, water and lack of pasture for the animals due to prolonged drought. In the process, children are at a risk of being lured and trafficked to different destination of both within Somalia or to Kenya for cheap child labour, sexual exploitation and organ harvesting. Due to the fact that women, girls and men are all looking for water, the available water points are increasingly becoming sources of gender-based violence and hot spots for human trafficking.

However, a Candle of Hope Foundation project has offered some income in terms of monthly cash transfers. Young women like Muuna have managed to pay school fees for her children, making them safe from trafficking of persons. At the same time, the community looks forward to utilizing the water from our rehabilitated water structure to support their livestock. However, there are challenges since the lifespan of the project is only 6 months and thus more long-term interventions are needed to sustain this progress. CoHF recommends that local communities together supported by local NGOs/ CBOs should be viewed as leaders, gatekeepers and decision-makers in identifying and implementing food security initiatives and climate change adaptation measures. This can in turn help minimize vulnerable members of communities being lured into exploitation and trafficking.

Photo courtesy of Candle of Hope Foundation



Recommendations and Funding Priorities

Direct Service Provision

- Scale up child protection and GBV services to respond to the growing protection needs among women and children. Child protection and GBV priorities should focus on improving access to, and availability of, lifesaving, age-appropriate GBV and child protection services necessary for recovery and reducing the risks of violence.
- Increase funding and support to social protection programmes (particularly cash transfers and distribution of relief food baskets), targeted to poor, vulnerable families to alleviate financial stress caused by the ongoing food crisis which is contributing to child labour, child sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect, child marriage and harmful practices.
- Fund and support the safe return to school for all children as a priority as this will help to address the increases reported in child labour, child sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect, child marriage and harmful practices. The provision of school feeding programmes in schools will alleviate reported increases in hunger and food insecurity.
- Strengthen inclusive services and systems for children on the move and take measures to keep essential services running after disaster strikes, through providing uprooted children with inclusive access to services, including education, healthcare, child protection, water and sanitation, etc.

Strengthen Policy Development

- Support the development of child-related migration policies that considers climate and environmental factors that are unique to the needs of children and young people. For example, comprehensive legislations on child rights, counter-trafficking in persons, migration framework, etc.
- Support the Federal Government to reinforce, implement, monitor and report on the policy instruments like the National Development Plan and international ones that have bearing on climate change, fragility, human trafficking and migration.
- Encourage policy makers to champion spaces for children and youth who have been uprooted/displaced as a result of climate change extremities by involving them in policy planning on climate mitigation and adaption, migration and child protection.

Support CSOs

- Forge close partnerships with the local civil society as they represent the victims and survivors of climate change, fragility and conflict on the ground. The role of the local CSOs must be strengthened if meaningful climate security response is to be achieved. This is largely because civil society actors and organizations can help to foster resilience to climate change through bottom-up processes.
- Develop specific initiatives with CSOs that support the provision of appropriate protection shelters for victims of trafficking and specifically to children.
- Increasing grants for strengthening the role of local CSOs in promoting food security and nutrition to develop sustainable agriculture and adapt to climate change.

Data Collection and Research

- Invest in innovative data sources to collect more and better data on children affected by climate change related displacement and migration. The data should be disaggregated by age, sex, vulnerability factors such as disability, location, migration status, household income and other key social and demographic variables. This can be done through by strengthening information sharing platforms and encourage action by key stakeholders to convey information to them in various forms, from brief reports, maps and data sheets to discussion forums and debates.
- Coordinate an anti-human trafficking protection cluster which brings together key stakeholders including government actors and CSOs to share information on human trafficking.
- Provide funding opportunities for local CSOs to undertake research on children in the context of migration and climate change as this is an area which remains underexplored.

Background

The Somali CSO Coalition is embedded in a wider Regional Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Network, a network of over 60 anti-trafficking CSOs from the Horn of Africa. CSOs in the network exchange best practices and lessons learned monthly and have been meeting at an annual CSO Forum since 2017. The Regional CSO Network is supported by the Better Migration Management (BMM) II Programme. The Programme is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and co-financed by the European Union (EUTF). The Programme's intervention partner countries are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.

The Coalition brings together eight Somali civil society organisations (CSOs) working on anti-human trafficking and protection of vulnerable migrants in South-Central Somalia, Somaliland, Jubaland and Puntland. Formed as a loosely organised group of like-minded CSOs working to protect vulnerable migrants and Victims of Trafficking (VoTs), the coalition meets on a quarterly basis to coordinate responses to common challenges.

To support the fight against human trafficking, the Regional CSO Network conducted a regional mapping of human trafficking routes funded through BMM and implemented by Freedom Collaborative. This mapping exercise provides key stakeholders with crucial information in the fight against human trafficking, such as trafficking hotspots, routes, modes of transport and types of exploitation in the regional. The findings of the mapping led to the idea by the Somali CSO Coalition to inform the donor community through a donor briefing of the vulnerability of children to trafficking in the context of the ongoing food crisis in Somalia. The brief outlines the operating context of children affected by the drought, case studies and captures recommendations made by the CSOs to the donor community.