

WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?

Voices from around the world on
drought and El Niño

**“We came because of the drought. We lost our
livestock. Some people like me remain poor.
For some people, nothing remains for them.”**
Amina Aden, from Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.



OXFAM



PUTTING POOR PEOPLE FIRST

Photo: Rodney Dekker/Oxfam

About 60 million people across Southern Africa and the Horn, Central America, and the Pacific face worsening hunger and poverty due to droughts and crop failures in 2014/5 that have been exacerbated by the El Niño weather system in 2015/6. This number is likely to rise.

This short report gives a voice to some of the people that Oxfam is working with in Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, El Salvador and Papua New Guinea.

They've told us that they have lived through bad times before, but that this drought is much worse than previous ones.

People go to bed with empty stomachs; toil in their fields or go to school with the gnawing pain of hunger; they walk or cycle for miles to try to find food. Many people have reduced the number of meals they eat per day to two or even one. Hunger hurts. For parents, the struggle to put food on the table has been acutely painful; children cry for food, babies nurse on empty breasts.

Many people have nothing left. Farmers and herders have worked hard, but now they watch their crops fail and their animals die.

Despite their best efforts, many communities and governments are being overwhelmed.

People cope by draining their savings and stocks, selling assets, borrowing money, and migrating to find work. When these are exhausted, coping strategies become

more damaging and women and girls often bear the brunt: dropping out of school, entering early and forced marriages, facing an increased risk of violence during longer trips to collect wood, food or water, and transactional sex.

People living in poverty are being forced to sacrifice their long-term interests to meet immediate needs.

Oxfam is working closely with local organizations in 20 countries to provide water, sanitation supplies, cash and vouchers; run cash-for-work programmes; provide animal food and slaughter destocking services; undertake assessments and support resilience building. See www.elNinooxfam.org

Above: "Before I had this container, I went five times a day for water. Now I can go once, and it will last me two or three days. It is 20 minutes downhill, so this makes me very happy. I am very grateful to the people who got this container for me." Claire John, Wonkama village, Papua New Guinea.

"I'm so happy, I want to cry." Francisca Ramírez of San Simon, eastern El Salvador, stands on the sidewalk with her neighbours holding a big sack of food, waiting for a truck to take her home. She had just received vouchers to spend on food.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the efforts of donors, governments and communities themselves are helping people survive and cope, it is not enough. There is not enough funding. Too many people are feeling the pain of hunger, the stress of how to provide food and water for their children, and shattered hopes for the future.

The harvests that could provide some relief are not for many months.¹ Such harvests will ease immediate food shortages, but will not allow livelihoods to recover or build resilience. And if a La Niña weather system occurs (which often brings floods to these drought-affected regions), recovery will take much longer.



Saredo, 30, with her two-year-old son Hassen. Saredo has bought beans and paracetamol for her son using money from Oxfam's cash distribution in Bisle, Ethiopia. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam



Robo, 50, collecting water from the Oxfam tank in the Hasboul internally displaced people (IDP) site in Siti Zone, Ethiopia. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam

Above: “It is very important for us to have water. It is the most important thing we can have. We would die of thirst without it. We thank the donors. Please continue your support. God bless you.” Robo, in Siti Zone, Ethiopia.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO:

Provide increased funding now to save lives and livelihoods. A pledging conference is urgently needed to provide a focus for increased resources. At the time of writing, the funding gap for 11 El Niño-affected countries is 63 percent – \$1.4bn is still needed out of \$2.31bn required.² This will mean critical gaps in the food pipeline leading to hunger, a lack of seeds for planting for the next season, and crucial shortages across WASH, protection and other areas of the response.

Put women's needs and capacities at the centre of this response. Women's burden of providing food, fuel and water for the family increases during drought. They eat last and least and have fewer options to mitigate the impact of drought, such as migration, weather information and credit. Gender assessments must be undertaken and used to design and implement responses.

Plan and prepare now for remaining uncertainty. Preparations should be made for poor *Belg* rains in some areas of Ethiopia³ and the possibility (currently estimated at 50 percent) of a La Niña.⁴

Increase investment in adaptation and resilience. Lasting solutions to recurrent disasters and chronic vulnerability must be found. Increased investments should encompass: increased scale and depth of social protection, agricultural reform, the promotion of climate-smart livelihoods options, and national resource and water management. Urgent action is needed to tackle climate change which makes disasters like this more likely.

Mainstream drought and emergency response into long-term development work. Disaster risk management should be brought into national development strategies. Increased coordination is required between humanitarian, development and climate change partners, and long-term flexible funding must be made available to scale up an early response.

Provide strong and decisive leadership. To prepare, act on warnings and respond effectively:

- **At national level:** many governments have demonstrated capable and confident leadership, but national, provincial and local preparedness and capacity to respond still need strengthening.
- **At regional level:** regional bodies – e.g. SADC, IGAD – could more strongly support national efforts through coordination, technical support and increased leverage with donors and international actors.
- **At international level:** A UN envoy is needed to champion this issue, focus political attention, provide a strategic overview for the response, and bring together different humanitarian and development agencies and approaches to find lasting solutions to recurrent drought.

IMPACT ACROSS THE WORLD



ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

Ethiopia has been worst hit, with 10.2 million people requiring food aid in 2016, in addition to the 7.9 million people receiving assistance through the government-led Productive Safety Net Programme. The government has provided leadership and considerable resources; however, as this is one of the worst droughts in at least 30 years, \$700m and more support is urgently required. Drought has affected other areas in the Horn, including Eritrea and Djibouti. Some 3.5 million people require urgent assistance in Sudan.

“If we lose our assets, we become nothing. Our moral hope dies. We will be broke forever and will not be able to look after our children...I can tell you about my life before and after the drought – the difference is great. Now we are reliant on aid. It is the biggest challenge I have seen in my lifetime.”
Habodo Gele, picking seed pods to eat with Habiiba in Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.



ASIA-PACIFIC

Droughts, erratic rains and frosts have affected most countries in the Pacific, with Papua New Guinea particularly in need of support. Rains in January and February provided some relief, but also led to flooding and landslides, and often were not enough to permeate the soil. Indonesia and the Philippines have been hard hit by drought, with areas of Mindanao declaring a state of calamity.

Tina Ko, and Skopi Kapa, 7, digging for kaukau (sweet potato) in Kafetugu Village, Henganofi Province, Papua New Guinea. Tina’s plot has been severely affected by the dry season – compounded by weevils, the lack of rain has destroyed the entire crop. They have resorted to eating banana roots and unripe boiled bananas.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

This rainy season – approximately November to March – has been the driest in 35 years. The main crop, maize, is failing; prices of maize in South Africa and Malawi were at record highs at the start of 2016 and 15.9 million people will not have enough to eat without external assistance. This figure will probably double by the end of the year. Key countries of concern are Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, with Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia on watch.

Meshina Mfungwe; Grace Nyondo; and Grace Nakipezge, (left to right) are from Zingalupiri village, Malawi. They decided to wait all night to make sure that they would be able to buy maize the next day from the government-run ADMARC depot in Mwamkumbwa, Chitipa, Malawi. This raised concerns for their safety and that of their children.



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Central America is facing one of the most severe droughts in its history—three consecutive years of drought, which have now been supercharged by El Niño. Around 3.5m people in the ‘dry corridor’ of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador are having serious difficulties accessing food, which won’t be relieved until the harvest in August. Drought is also affecting countries across the Caribbean; it seriously affects 3.6m people in Haiti and 1m in Cuba. Flooding has also hit several countries in South America.

“With the vouchers, we will be able to feed ourselves. I’ll sleep better at night.” Maria Leticia Guzman. “Poor people age quickly because of the worry.” Pablo Hernandez, who had two children diagnosed with malnutrition. These villagers from San Pablo in Morazan, El Salvador, received food vouchers.



"THERE IS NO RELIEF FROM THIS HUNGER"

Across all four regions, people go to bed with empty stomachs; toil in their fields or go to school with the gnawing pain of hunger; they walk or cycle for miles to try and find food. Many people have reduced the number of meals they eat per day, to two or even one. Hunger hurts.

In Ethiopia, pastoralists in Siti Zone walked for days to reach places where they can access regular food or cash distributions. In Southern Africa, people are walking and/or waiting for hours to try to buy food.

For parents, the struggle to put food on the table has been acutely painful. Children cry for food, babies nurse on empty breasts. Many children are dropping out of school—because they are too hungry to concentrate, or because they must support their families' search for food and fuel. In Ethiopia, children are being given seeds; in Malawi, they are given cowpea leaves or porridge made from maize husks. These are not sufficient in terms of energy and nutrition.

Food may be available in markets, but prices have rocketed.

Women eat last and least. Reducing the number of meals per day takes a particularly heavy toll on pregnant and nursing women.

Above: "I'm here because I'm hungry. This is the worst drought I remember since I was born. There is no rain. All my livestock have died. I used to drink milk but all my camels are dead. I had 50. They are all dead."

Mohamed Litere, in Harisso IDP Camp in Siti Zone, Ethiopia.

"Pupils are very frank, they tell us that there is no food in their homes, and if you insist that they should not abscond from lessons, some ask teachers to adopt them if we have food so that they can continue learning. Imagine you sleep without food today, and tomorrow morning you go to school. Do you think a seven-year-old will understand that even though there is hunger, learning has to proceed?" Vasco Nyirenda, headteacher of Malepera Primary School in Kasungu, Malawi.

Opposite, top right: "This is the longest dry season we have ever experienced." Lodwina Martin, from Danbagl village, Papua New Guinea.

“Because I’m pregnant I feel very hungry and I have to ask my neighbours for food. My son always cries when he is hungry. I just put him on my back and walk around and walk around in order for him to forget the hunger.”
Saredo, from Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.

Bottom right: “I don’t remember a drought this bad. When I get hungry I feel mentally weak and I don’t want to work. My abdomen burns. Drinking water doesn’t help. I sometimes vomit. There is no relief from this hunger. We have no option other than being strong.” Lule Abrahn, in Harisso IDP camp, Ethiopia.



Smiley Jacob and 9.5-month-old daughter Grace, in Tugumpaso Village, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Grace is being measured for malnutrition. Her MUAC (Mid Upper Arm Circumference) was found to be 11cm, in the red zone; at her age it should be 15–16cm. Photo: Rodney Dekker/Oxfam



Lodwina Martin, from Danbagl village, Papua New Guinea
Photo: Rodney Dekker/Oxfam



Government-controlled ADMARC depots in Malawi should provide maize at accessible prices, but many are empty, like this one in Mpirisi. Photo: Joseph Mwale/Oxfam



Lule Abrahn, in Harisso IDP camp, Ethiopia.
Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam

"OUR LIVES DEPEND ON WATER"

Water is the essence of life. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the drylands of Ethiopia. As pastoralist Lule Abrahm says, 'Our lives depend on water. Water is first, before food.' According to Abdi, a farmer: 'What good is land, what good is soil without water?'

The search for water for people and livestock has become desperate in Ethiopia. Women walk for two to six hours a day; men have to dig wells deeper and deeper and herd their thirsty cattle for miles. When people lost their livestock to the drought, they walked for days to get to places where they could access water and other services.

Elsewhere, those worst hit by the drought are those dependent on rain-fed agriculture – which is most of the rural population. In Southern Africa, seasonal streams dried up months ago, and even perennial rivers and boreholes are empty. The drying up of water sources and lowering of dam levels meant that kitchen gardens could not be irrigated, so gardens that should have been full of pumpkins, watermelons, cucumbers and tomatoes in February and March were empty.

Above: A smallholder farmer in search of water in the dried-up Dewure River, Gutu district, Zimbabwe.

"Before the drought, it took two or three men to dig a well. Now it takes nine. They used to have to dig three or four metres down. Now they must dig 20 metres." Habado Abdi, from Bildik, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.

"We walked for three or four hours to get to the borehole. The well had dried up, so we went to a distant place or dug the well deeper. It became hard to get water. We have had the Oxfam tank here for two months. It is good because it's near to us, we can easily fetch water every day. We didn't have to go to the distant place. We don't feel as thirsty as we did before. Lack of water causes us to feel very thirsty and weak, and our children keep crying." Makowa Beri, Siti Zone, Ethiopia

Main picture: "The water is retreating deeper and deeper [when wells are dug]. Only Allah knows when it is going to come back. We are afraid it won't. We live by water, our cattle live by water. Without water we are no more... My greatest fear is if the trucks stop bringing water. What will happen to us?" Buho Asowe Eye, currently staying at Hariso IDP site, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.



Shukri Ige and Amina Hassen need to get water from a well dug by villagers in Siti Zone, Ethiopia, but the holes are getting drier and, often, water collected this way is not suitable for drinking.
Photo: Abiy Getahun/Oxfam



Silas Orrocco, a community leader at Sirumgoralo, Papua New Guinea, shows the water level in one of his village's two 90,000-litre water tanks. It's rained only twice or three times per fortnight; in a regular dry season it should be four times a week.
Photo: Rodney Dekker/Oxfam



Buho Asowe Eye, currently staying at Hariso IDP site, Siti Zone, Ethiopia. Photo: Abiy Getahun/Oxfam

"I HAVE NOTHING LEFT"

"This drought has lasted longer than any others. Other droughts haven't cost [us] our livestock. Now, after my livestock died, I have become poor. I have nothing left. My husband has gone to Djibouti to look for a job. He has been gone for 10 months." Hawa, in Hारisso IDP site, Ethiopia

Many people have nothing left. Farmers and herders have worked hard, but now they watch their crops fail and their animals die. Successive years of drought in Ethiopia, Southern Africa and Central America have taken their toll.

Crops grow where water flows, but the rains have been erratic and light. Crops are stunted, and dry spells at the wrong time in the growing cycle mean no harvests – so no food and no income.

A pastoralist's wealth is animals, yet many in Ethiopia have lost most of their cattle, sheep and goats. More than 500,000 animals have died in Ethiopia, and thousands of cattle in Zimbabwe.

Herds will take years to fully recover, and farmers have few seeds to plant for the next harvest. As farmer José Martínez in El Salvador put it, 'now even if the weather was right, we wouldn't be able to plant a cornfield because we don't have the resources.'

There are few opportunities to earn cash - with crops failing, there is little opportunity to work other people's land. As 11-year-old Mervis Phiri from Malawi says: 'My parents depend on piece-work in the estates; if there is no work, it means no food at home.' People are forced into selling assets and going into debt.

"I was expecting a yield of 15 tonnes on my plot, but with these unforgiving conditions, I will be lucky to even harvest 0.5 tonnes of grain." Boaz Chimombe, a 59-year-old farmer with over 20 years of experience in Buhera Area, Zimbabwe.

"The person from whom I borrowed the money comes here often asking for the money, but I have nowhere to get it. I do not care what happens now, because even if I find that money, the priority will not be to pay back the debt, but to buy food." Elenata Chikaonda, from Eneya Village, Balaka, Malawi, who had to borrow money to buy 5kg of maize.

Bottom right: "Last year, we planted crops but harvested very little. In the first season, we had only 30 percent of our normal harvest." Anastasio Gonzalez, El Salvador.



Maggie Dick, from Kafetugu village, Heganofi District, Papua New Guinea, sells pineapples at the nearby market to earn cash, but the dry season has stunted some of her crop. Photo: Rodney Dekker/Oxfam



Rudo Gumbi hoping for a harvest from a dried-up field in Gutu, Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. Photo: Innocent Katsande/Oxfam



Anastasio Gonzalez, a member of the Chilanga Municipality City Council and Environment Commission in El Salvador, with villager Pablo Hernandez. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America

THE RESPONSE IS WORKING – BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH

The needs are huge. In Ethiopia, the government is leading a complex operation that is now getting food and water to many millions. Village heads and health workers tell the same story as local officials – people are struggling but aid is getting through and is having an impact. As Seido in Harisso says, ‘we are surviving because of the water we are getting.’

Across affected countries, relief programmes—including the provision of food, cash transfers, water and sanitation, health, slaughter destocking, animal services and fodder for core breeding animals, seeds and inputs – are meeting acute needs.

But it is not enough. The funding gap is huge, which means that there are critical shortages in the supply of such basic support as food, water and health, as well as many other gaps in the response. If this doesn’t change, the situation will deteriorate and people will suffer. Already, almost one million children need treatment for severe acute malnutrition in Eastern and Southern Africa.⁵

There remains uncertainty over how long the crisis will last – will the next rains be adequate? Will this El Niño be followed by a La Niña? We need to prepare for the worst, while hoping for the best.

More resources are urgently required.

Main photo: Marian Gedi receiving cash at an Oxfam distribution in Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith



Distributing animal feed in Harisso, Siti Zone, Ethiopia. 80 percent of the people in Siti Zone depends on livestock farming.

Photo: AbbieTrayler-Smith

➔ Right: “The children have to walk one and half hours to get to school. Before this programme, they had to do this without anything in their stomachs...The vouchers were a huge help.” Rosa Yaneth Chávez received three months’ support to purchase food and hygiene essentials via an emergency voucher programme. This gave Rosa the chance to buy what her family needed at a small local supermarket.

“We used to leave at 6am to collect water from the hand-dug wells, and return at 10 am. It was very tiring. The water truck is much better.” Ouda, from Bisle, Ethiopia.

“Before the drought, our children had nutritious food. Now we are left with just soil. Nobody can eat soil. As you can see, we are dependent on the government and NGOs for help. We have received maize, wheat, and oil. We mostly depend on help from others. We are happy to receive help, but it is difficult to depend on it.” Tahiroble Abdi, from Bildik, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.

“There is nothing for us in the future. We are depending on food aid and support from the government and NGOs. We don’t have enough help though. We need more. Our main concern is that we need cash to buy the things we need.” Lule Abrahn, in Harisso IDP camp, Ethiopia.

➔ Right: “We have never known a drought like this before. The previous droughts would only continue for a short while, then we would get rain. Our livestock was not affected. This drought is very hard.” Ambara Ali, 60, receiving cash from the Oxfam distribution point in Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.



Rosa Yaneth Chávez, a mother of six who lives near Berlin, El Salvador
Photo: James Rodriguez/Oxfam America



Ambara Ali, Bisle, Siti Zone, Ethiopia.
Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Climate change will bring more extreme weather and droughts. This crisis demonstrates that rich countries need to make good on their promises to tackle climate change by reducing emissions and by setting and meeting ambitious targets for adaptation funding.

Along with the emergency assistance needed now, more longer term investment is essential to ensure that people are better able to withstand future crises. The benefits of investing in building the resilience of households and communities consistently outweigh the costs, and reduce the cost of humanitarian responses in the future.⁶

Social protection systems – both formal and informal – have a key role to play in providing a buffer against shocks, and the confidence for farmers to invest in a better future. The scale and depth of social protection schemes must be extended.

Women produce up to 90 percent of food for rural people living in poverty. However, this production is a challenge: only 10–20 percent of women own their land, and they have poorer access to weather information, inputs and extension services than their male counterparts.

Small-scale farmers are resilient and hardworking. They are open to new approaches, but they need support. There are good examples and pilot programmes, but they need to be rolled out at scale. Greater investment is needed in natural resource management, conservation agriculture, increased access to water, markets, weather information, and other livelihood support – ensuring that this is explicitly designed to support women. Climate change adaptation funding has a big role to play in supporting this.

Communities know the package of measures that they need. In one village in Gutu, southern Zimbabwe, Levison Chiremba is appealing for an irrigation scheme and the construction of a dam; Tendai Chidya wants support to revive the village savings and lending scheme and Robert Nyabadza is making the case for government agricultural extension workers to provide information on farming practices and climate change.

← Left: “Our land was fertile and we used to get good harvests, but then the weather changed; the rain is really erratic. You work and work but get nothing back if there’s no water...Now I’m campaigning for more irrigation systems in my region. Such unreliable rainfall patterns have driven us to adapt – but also to call for help. We need support so that we can continue to make enough money to put our children in school, to care for our communities at health centres, to drink clean water and to protect ourselves from waterborne diseases.” Ipaishie Masvingise, a farmer from Gutu, southern Zimbabwe, who joined a successful irrigation scheme.

Bottom right: “Now my garden is much more productive, and the growing season is longer than before. My tomatoes used to last only a month, but this time they lasted three months. Now, at a time when it’s expensive to buy chillies, tomatoes and cucumbers in the market, I can get them from my own garden. I can even sell vegetables to my neighbours.” Flor Marina Aquino, of El Ranchon, La Herradura, El Salvador.

“Without water, there can be no crops or grass, and without grass there can be no livestock. Maybe we should focus on building a reservoir, or on catching rainwater for drip irrigation systems.” Gregorio Flores, vice president of a local development association in El Salvador.



Joan Sundae, Coordinator for Oxfam’s local partner, KGWan, in Papua New Guinea. Oxfam is working with partners to support farmers in the Highlands to adapt their farming practices during drought. Photo: David Shields/Oxfam



Flor Marina Aquino, of El Ranchon, La Herradura, El Salvador, who is part of a resilience programme that is changing cultivation techniques and timing, and shifting from chemical to homemade organic fertilizer. This year’s El Niño has proved that the techniques work. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America

Notes

- 1 August 2016 in Papua New Guinea and Central America, November 2016 in Ethiopia, and May 2017 in Southern Africa
- 2 OCHA. (2016). El Niño: Overview of impact, projected humanitarian needs, and response. Retrieved 5 April 2016 from <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/El%20Niño%20Monthly%20Overview%209%20March%2016.pdf>
- 3 FAO. (2016, March 9). GIEWS Country Briefs: Ethiopia. Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=ETH>
- 4 NOAA. (2016) ENSO: Recent Evolution, Current Status and Predictions. Retrieved from: http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/lanina/enso_evolution-status-fcsts-web.pdf
- 5 OCHA. (2016) op cit
- 6 DFID. (2013). The Economics of Early Response and Resilience. http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Hum_Response/61114_Summary_of_Findings_Final_July_22.pdf

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LAST WORDS

“I am sure one day all this will be over. When I become a nurse, I will be able to support my parents. I don’t want my children to suffer the way I am, so I will continue working hard.” Mervis Phiri, 11, from Lijanga village, Kasungu, Malawi.

“This is the worst drought. If the drought continues, we have no hope.”
Theresa Sundu, Wonkama village, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

“We think about what our lives will be like in the future. What will we eat tomorrow? That’s all we can think about. I always think about my livestock too. If they were alive, my life would be as good as it was in the past. Today I will go around the village to beg for rice to eat tonight. We are hungry; we need support. Today can you help me? When can you help us?” Lule Abrahn, Harisso, Ethiopia.

“From the looks of things this year, I am scared. I have never witnessed such a poor rainfall pattern since I was born. There have been times in the past when the rains would be problematic, but this year’s dry spell is beyond our comprehension.” Dyna, a farmer in Malawi.

“Poor people age quickly because of worry. Hunger is a stress that you’re carrying all the time. You want to give everything to your children.” Pablo Hernandez, San Pablo in eastern El Salvador.

Above: A child from Bisle eats seed pods from a local evergreen tree that grows throughout Siti Zone, Ethiopia. Abbie Traylor-Smith/Oxfam
Front cover picture: Abbie Traylor-Smith



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