

Hotter Planet, Humanitarian Crisis

**El Niño, the “new normal” and
the need for climate justice**

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The drought in Somaliland means that Hodan must regularly walk for two hours to fetch water with her baby Naima strapped to her back.

Abbreviations

CO2	Carbon dioxide
CPI	Climate Policy Initiative
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gas
NAPs	National Adaptation Plans
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NOAA	US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures (developed by the FAO & WFP)
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WIM	Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage

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Introduction

The world is currently enduring an unprecedented combination of climate-related crises. We are living through what will almost certainly be the hottest year on record, and have faced one of the strongest El Niño weather events of all time.

At the same time, in 2016 the Earth has recorded the highest ever level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which are set to rise still further. Many climate scientists are concluding that climate change and El Niño are combining to create new and extreme impacts that are unprecedented.

The 2015-16 El Niño may yet prove to have caused the biggest drought that the world has ever seen. Many countries are enduring their worst droughts in decades, affecting hundreds of millions of people. National emergencies have been declared in several countries with women particularly affected by the crisis.

The El Niño weather phenomenon itself may have passed, but its impact is still growing as food insecurity resulting from drought is not expected to end for millions of people until the middle of next year.

Affected countries currently face a funding shortfall of US\$3.1 billion to cope with the on-going crisis, which is expected to last for many months, in some cases until June next year. Immediate support for farmers, particularly in East and Southern Africa where the growing season has just started, is urgently required. A timely response could help avoid another food crisis in 2017.

Even though the Paris Agreement on climate change was celebrated with much fanfare less than a year ago, the lack of adequate response to the global El Niño drought shows that the world is not yet willing or able to respond properly to an actual climate crisis.

Not only must the world now act to further cut greenhouse gas emissions, but as predictable and climate-induced extreme weather events are likely to become the “new normal,” far greater efforts are needed to prevent these from becoming humanitarian crises. Governments, donors, climate and humanitarian agencies must work together to build people’s and countries’ resilience, and prepare for and respond to an increasingly climate-chaotic world.



School children affected by drought in the Janamora region, Ethiopia.

PHOTO: GONZALO GUJARDO/ ACTIONAID

Section 1

2016: A record-breaking climate emergency



Box 1: A record-breaking year:

- Governments and humanitarian agencies are still struggling to cope with one of the largest climate crises the world has ever seen.
- 2016 is almost certain to be the world's hottest year since records began.
- Global temperature records have been broken every month for the last 16 months.
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels have reached their highest ever levels and continue to rise.
- One of the strongest ever El Niño events on record has been taking place in 2015-16.
- 30% of the Earth's land mass was affected by drought in 2015, in one of the most widespread and longest-lasting El Niño events on record.
- Over 400 million people have been affected worldwide, with women and children being hit the hardest. This may prove to be the largest drought crisis the world has ever faced.

A new global agreement on climate change: *Have we already forgotten Paris?*

It is shocking that in the year immediately following the fanfare of the December 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, the world has been largely silent on one of the biggest-ever global climate emergencies.

In the build up to the COP21 climate negotiations in Paris in December 2015, with climate change causing more intense and frequent floods, droughts, typhoons, rising sea levels and erratic rainfall patterns¹ around the world, hundreds of thousands of people marched in the streets to demand climate action. Amid these negotiations and a global outpouring of concern about climate issues, every nation on the planet recognised the importance of addressing this global challenge.

Governments at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) responded by agreeing to a new global framework to cut greenhouse gas emissions, and to provide

developing countries with finance and support to cope with the impacts and make the transition to greener pathways.

In 2016, as the world continued to celebrate the Paris Agreement, the planet smashed through atmospheric CO₂ and temperature records, reaching an estimated 1.3°C warming above pre-industrial levels. A combination of climate change and the weather phenomenon called "El Niño" has brought one of the most severe, long-lasting and complex drought events that the planet has experienced in modern times. In one of the biggest climate emergencies ever seen, crop failure, hunger and starvation have affected hundreds of millions of people across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Women are particularly vulnerable to the harshest impacts of this event.

Climate change is playing a key role in this global disaster. And yet the world has been strangely silent on the issue.

This crisis was both predicted and to a large extent preventable. Even as humanitarian agencies and NGOs raised the alarm at the growing scale of

1. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/what-the-ipcc-report-says-about-extreme-weather-events>.

the emergency, and pleaded to the world to help avoid catastrophe, **the same governments that promised climate compassion in Paris apparently turned their backs on an actual global climate crisis.**

In April 2016, almost a year after the first strong warnings were issued,² as water sources dried up and crops withered across much of the world, and as UN humanitarian experts predicted that up to 100 million people would need international humanitarian relief, world leaders met at UN headquarters in New York to celebrate the official signing ceremony of the Paris Agreement. A succession of soaring speeches celebrated the climate action that the new deal would supposedly bring, but not a single leader referred to the fact that the planet was already in the grip of one of the most widespread drought crises ever seen.

The stark contrast between the celebrations over the Paris Agreement, and the lack of international response to an actual climate crisis at the speed and scale required, shows how much needs to be done to ensure that global decision-making on the climate can help the most vulnerable. The 2015-16 El Niño crisis has exposed a clear disconnect between climate rhetoric and humanitarian action.

The injustice of climate change means that countries that are most exposed to climate impacts also tend to be the least responsible for causing the problem, and the least financially able to prepare and cope. Thus when vulnerable countries suffer climate-induced humanitarian disasters, the countries with the greatest responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, and the deepest pockets for providing support, must

step forward. With global temperatures predicted to continue rising, and disasters becoming ever more common, climate change and humanitarian agencies must increasingly work together to develop effective and fair responses that target the needs of the most vulnerable.

The hottest year ever

2015 was the hottest year on record.³ It surpassed the previous hottest year, which was 2014. **It is now almost certain that 2016 will be the hottest on record**, the third record year in a row.⁴ Sixteen of the 17 warmest years on record have been since 2000, according to the UK Met Office,⁵ and of these, 2005, 2010, 2014 and 2015 have all been record breakers.⁶ If climate change was not taking place, record hot years would occur only once every 150 years.

Every month produces new devastating figures:

- September 2016 broke records for the hottest September ever,⁷ marking the 17th record-setting month in a row of highest average temperatures for the globe, the longest such streak in 137 years of modern record-keeping.⁸
- Scientists have confirmed that August 2016 was the hottest month ever recorded, in which average global temperature was an alarming 0.16°C more than the previous warmest August in 2014.⁹
- NASA now expect the average temperature for 2016 to be around 1.25°C warmer than average temperatures at the end of the 19th century.¹⁰

2. Oxfam, A Preventable Crisis, July 2016, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/a-preventable-crisis-el-nio-and-la-nia-events-need-earlier-responses-and-a-rene-617022>.

3. 'New report confirms 2015 hottest year on record', 3 August 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/new-report-confirms-2015-hottest-year-record>.

4. The Guardian, 18 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/oct/18/2016-locked-into-being-hottest-year-on-record-nasa-says>.

5. Damian Carrington, 'Shattered records show climate change is an emergency today, scientists warn', 17 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/17/shattered-records-climate-change-emergency-today-scientists-warn>.

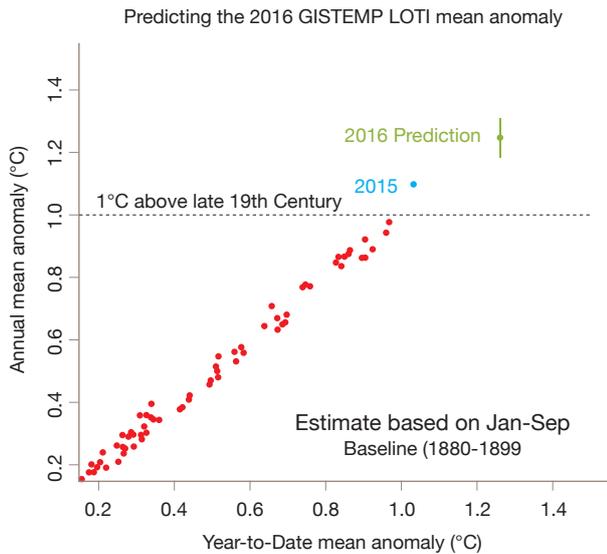
6. Karl Mathiesen, 'Why is 2016 smashing heat records?', 4 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/mar/04/is-el-nino-or-climate-change-behind-the-run-of-record-temperatures>.

7. NASA analysis finds warmest September on record by narrow margin 17 October 2016, <http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/news/20161017/>.

8. 'Extraordinary global heat continues', 21 September 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/extraordinary-global-heat-continues>.

9. 'Extraordinary global heat continues', 21 September 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/extraordinary-global-heat-continues>.

10. The Guardian, 18 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/oct/18/2016-locked-into-being-hottest-year-on-record-nasa-says>.



Global Temperature data

With the latest data from September, NASA's Goddard Institute believe that 2016 is now almost certain to be the hottest annual temperature on record.¹¹

CREDIT: THE GODDARD INSTITUTE, NASA

As a result, huge areas of the world are experiencing record temperatures locally. According to the UN's World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), January–June 2016 was characterised by warmer to much-warmer-than-average conditions engulfing most of the world's land and ocean surfaces. Record warmth was widespread across Alaska, western Canada, southern Mexico, northern South America, central Africa, Indonesia, northern and eastern Australia, North Indian Ocean, and across parts of north-central Russia, western Asia, central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, the southwestern Pacific Ocean, and the northwestern Atlantic Ocean.¹²

Average global temperatures can mask even greater extremes felt at local level, and individual countries have faced soaring, record heat. On 21 July 2016, the town of Mitribah in Kuwait set a new highest temperature record for the Eastern hemisphere and Asia, with a reported temperature of 54.0°C.¹³ In May, India set a new national temperature record of 51°C in Rajasthan.¹⁴ Highest ever temperatures have been recorded in 2016 in

Thailand (at 44.6°C), Cambodia (at 42.6°C) and the Maldives (at 34.9°C).¹⁵

ActionAid's work with communities has found that those living in poverty in the world's vulnerable countries are the worst affected by these impacts. These record high temperatures are threatening the planet's food systems and making life increasingly difficult.

The most carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, ever

In 2016, carbon dioxide concentrations passed the symbolic milestone of 400 parts per million in the atmosphere, continuing to add to the heating effect in the Earth's atmosphere.

According to Prof Stefan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, 'We know from Antarctic ice cores that go back almost a million years that CO2 was never even remotely as high as this'; the rate at which humanity is emitting CO2 is the fastest for 66 million years.¹⁶

11. <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/september-hottest-month-climate-change-20791>.
 12. 'WMO examines reported record temperature of 54°C in Kuwait', 26 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/wmo-examines-reported-record-temperature-of-54°C2%B0c-kuwait>.
 13. 'WMO examines reported record temperature of 54°C in Kuwait', 26 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/wmo-examines-reported-record-temperature-of-54°C2%B0c-kuwait>.
 14. 'WMO examines reported record temperature of 54°C in Kuwait', 26 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/wmo-examines-reported-record-temperature-of-54°C2%B0c-kuwait>.
 15. John Vidal, 'El Niño is over – but it leaves nearly 100 million people short of food', 30 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/30/el-nino-is-over-but-it-leaves-nearly-100-million-people-short-of-food>.
 16. Damian Carrington, 'Shattered records show climate change is an emergency today, scientists warn', 17 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/17/shattered-records-climate-change-emergency-today-scientists-warn>.

Human activity has increased the direct warming effect of CO₂ in the atmosphere by 50% above pre-industrial levels during the past 25 years, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.¹⁷

Even as the world apparently recognises that we must take drastic action to mitigate climate change, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. Rising temperatures and devastating climate impacts are the result.

One of the strongest El Niños in history

El Niño is a naturally-occurring global weather cycle that takes place every three to seven years. It is caused by unusually warm ocean temperatures that can disrupt weather patterns – in particular rainfall and temperatures – around the globe.

Many scientists have declared the 2015-16 El Niño to be been *one of the strongest in history*, rivalling the 1982-3 and 1997-8 events that devastated large areas of the planet.¹⁸ This has brought long droughts, scorching temperatures, water shortages and flooding around the world.

In 2015 the planet experienced *the largest area of land*¹⁹ affected by drought since the severe droughts of the 1980’s – covering 30 percent of the planet. Some of the most extreme weather has occurred in Southern Africa and Southern Asia, where many countries have experienced their worst droughts and most intense heat waves in decades.²⁰ ActionAid country programmes have been desperately working to deliver relief, and support affected communities to be resilient to these impacts.

The 2015-16 El Niño has also been one of the *longest*, with a build-up period that caused droughts

in advance of the formal El Niño declaration. Some regions (such as Central America and parts of Southern Africa) already faced droughts in 2014 due to a ‘failed El Niño’ that started to build but then stopped prior to the declaration of the official El Niño in 2015. It is likely that the 2014 failed El Niño was responsible for some droughts, as well as for the weak Indian monsoon of 2014, which extended the duration of the drought. The impacts of current droughts are more serious in regions where they have persisted for two or three years. There, peoples’ coping strategies are eroded, and their agricultural assets have often been sold off.

The current El Niño cycle is drawing to an end, and some countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia and have received rains. But this is by no means the end of the crisis. For some countries, particularly those in southern Africa where the next main harvest is not expected until June-July 2017, it will still be months before crops can be harvested. The impacts in terms of hunger and loss of livelihoods will continue for many months to come for many people in countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Climate change interacting with El Niño

El Niño has contributed to the record temperatures of 2015 and 2016. But this contribution is a fraction of the impact caused by man-made greenhouse emissions. Scientists are now studying how the two phenomena of climate change and El Niño are combining and are likely to do so in the future.

In June 2016 the WMO stated: ‘The strong El Niño – which has now dissipated – fuelled the high temperatures witnessed so far in 2016. But the underlying cause of global warming remains greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activities.’²¹

17. ‘April continues record temperature streak’, 20 May 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/april-continues-record-temperature-streak>.

18. Linda Hirons and Nick Klingaman, ‘La Niña 2016/2017: historical impact analysis’, 2016, <https://core.ac.uk/display/42154511>; ‘Scientists: 2016 likely to be hottest year on record despite looming La Niña’, 25 May 2016, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/scientists-2016-likely-to-be-hottest-year-on-record-despite-looming-la-nina>.

19. NOAA “2015 state of the climate: drought” August 2016 <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/featured-images/2015-state-climate-drought>.

20. John Vidal, ‘El Niño is over – but it leaves nearly 100 million people short of food’, 30 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/30/el-nino-is-over-but-it-leaves-nearly-100-million-people-short-of-food>.

21. ‘May 2016 sets new records’, 17 June 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/may-2016-sets-new-records>.

When 2015 was declared as the hottest year thus far, Gavin Schmidt of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies noted that "Even without El Niño this would have been the hottest year on record",²² emphasising that climate change is the key underlying factor at play.

Indeed, although there is no scientific consensus, many scientists suggest that only around a quarter to a fifth of the global temperature rise seen in recent months is due to El Niño.²³ While this added impact of El Niño is significant, particularly on crops and water availability, the fact is that the disaster felt this year cannot entirely be explained away as a purely natural phenomenon. These findings clearly show that man-made climate change is indeed largely responsible for the impacts that are taking place.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that **'climate change has intensified the effects of this year's El Niño'**.²⁴ It states that, while there is no evidence that climate change is increasing the frequency of El Niño and La Niña events, 'it is likely to increase the impacts, especially of El Niño, in terms of more intense heat, drought, and heavier precipitation'.²⁵ (see box for more information on La Niña). There is increasing evidence that the cause-effect relationship between El Niño and climate change may be a reciprocal one. Scientific models suggest that global warming is in fact likely to double the frequency of extreme El Niño events in future.²⁶

Big El Niño events are thought to occur when the warm waters from Asia push strongly eastward across the Pacific towards the coasts of North and South America. But due to climate change, temperatures appear to be rising more quickly in the eastern Pacific compared to surrounding ocean waters, creating more atmospheric convection and pushing the extra heat to spread further, creating conditions for a big El Niño event.²⁷

A similar study of La Niña (see box) projected 'a near doubling in the frequency of future extreme La Niña events, from one in every 23 years to one in every 13 years'.²⁸

According to the WMO, scientific assessments have found that many extreme events in the 2011-15 period, especially those relating to extreme high temperatures, have had their probabilities substantially increased as a result of human-caused ("anthropogenic") climate change – by a factor of 10 or more in some cases.²⁹ Most studies based on instrumental records indicate that droughts have become more frequent, intense and widespread during the last 50 years.³⁰ Researchers have found the strongest connections between El Niño and intense drought in Australia, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brazil, parts of east and southern Africa, the western Pacific basin islands (including Hawaii), Central America, and various parts of the United States.³¹

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22. The Guardian, "2015 smashes record for hottest year, final figures confirm" 21 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/20/2015-smashes-record-for-hottest-year-final-figures-confirm>.
 23. Damian Carrington, 'Shattered records show climate change is an emergency today, scientists warn', 17 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/17/shattered-records-climate-change-emergency-today-scientists-warn>; Renee Cho, 'El Niño and Global Warming—What's the Connection?', 2 February 2016, <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2016/02/02/el-nino-and-global-warming-whats-the-connection/>; Karl Mathiesen, 'Why is 2016 smashing heat records?', 4 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/mar/04/is-el-nino-or-climate-change-behind-the-run-of-record-temperatures>.
 24. 'Averting disasters by being prepared', 16 September 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/averting-disasters-being-prepared>.
 25. 'Climate Change - Humanitarian Impact', <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/advocacy/thematic-campaigns/climate-change/humanitarian-impact>.
 26. Wenju Cai et al, 'Increasing frequency of extreme El Niño events due to greenhouse warming', 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259868282_Increasing_Frequency_of_Extreme_El_Nino_Events_due_to_Greenhouse_Warming.
 27. Fred Pearce, 'El Niño and Climate Change: Wild Weather May Get Wilder', 11 February 2016, http://e360.yale.edu/feature/el_nino_and_climate_change_wild_weather_may_get_wilder/2960/.
 28. Wenju Cai et al, 'Increased frequency of extreme La Niña events under greenhouse warming', 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273287307_Increased_frequency_of_extreme_La_Nina_events_under_greenhouse_warming.
 29. 'WMO examines reported record temperature of 54°C in Kuwait', 26 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/wmo-examines-reported-record-temperature-of-54%C2%B0C-kuwait>.
 30. I. Masih et al, 'A review of droughts on the African continent: A geospatial and long-term perspective', <http://www.hydrol-earth-syst-sci.net/18/3635/2014/hess-18-3635-2014.pdf>.
 31. 'ENSO and Drought Forecasting', <http://drought.unl.edu/droughtbasics/ensoandforecasting.aspx>.

Box 2: “Turning up the heat”

“Our scientific understanding of El Niño has increased greatly in recent years. However, this event is playing out in uncharted territory. Our planet has altered dramatically because of climate change, the general trend towards a warmer global ocean, the loss of Arctic sea ice and of over a million square km of summer snow cover in the Northern hemisphere. So this naturally occurring El Niño event and human-induced climate change may interact and modify each other in ways which we have never before experienced. Even before the onset of El Niño, global average surface temperatures had reached new records. El Niño is turning up the heat even further.”

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation.³²

Box 3: Preparing for a possible La Niña

El Niño events are often followed immediately by a La Niña event. La Niña is defined as cooler-than-normal sea-surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical parts of the Pacific Ocean, and leads to varying weather impacts in different of the world. (For example in the US it tends to lead to above average precipitation in some parts of the country, and below average precipitation in others). It often lasts longer than El Niño, sometimes persisting or recurring for two or more years. In the past 60 years, nine out of the last 15 El Niños have been followed by a La Niña.³³

La Niñas can bring above average rainfall and cooler temperatures in the Southern Hemisphere in the aftermath of an El Niño. However, strong La Niñas can bring floods and storms, compounding the impact of El Niño and possibly extending hunger crises for affected women and their communities.

At this point in time it is unclear whether La Niña is taking place, or if it will take place, toward the end of 2016. In May, OCHA warned of a 55–60 per cent chance of La Niña occurring toward the end of 2016, compounding the impact of El Niño.³⁴ While the US oceanic agency NOAA stated in September³⁵ that the likelihood of La Niña developing was low, in October it increased the likelihood to 70 per cent, which it forecast to be a weak one.³⁶ The Japanese meteorological agency has already warned of indications that a La Niña event is beginning.³⁷

Following the declaration that El Niño was over, heavy rainfall and floods hit India, unprecedented snowfall occurred in Lesotho, Hurricane Matthew hammered Haiti and the US, and a double typhoon hit the Philippines. With the current uncertainty over its status, these events have not officially been attributed to La Niña, but do fit within a worrying trend of a marked increase in extreme weather.

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32. WMO “El Niño expected to strengthen further” 16 November 2015 <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/el-niño-expected-strengthen-further-high-impacts-unprecedented-preparation>.
33. ‘Scientists: 2016 likely to be hottest year on record despite looming La Niña’, 25 May 2016, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/scientists-2016-likely-to-be-hottest-year-on-record-despite-looming-la-nina>.
34. ‘El Niño in Southern Africa’, <http://www.unocha.org/el-niño-southern-africa>.
35. Emily Becker, ‘September 2016 ENSO update: Cooling our heels’, 8 September 2016, <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/enso/september-2016-enso-update-cooling-our-heels>.
36. NOAA, ENSO diagnostic discussion, 13 October 2016, http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_disc_oct2016/enso-disc.shtml.
37. ‘Japan sees 70 pct chance of La Nina continuing through winter’, 9 September 2016, <http://news.trust.org/item/20160909071953-nvclf/>.

Section 2

An Unprecedented Humanitarian Crisis

ActionAid Case Study 1: Failed harvest and hunger, Zimbabwe

Clara Gurauzive, Bandera village, Mbire

"We planted our maize crop mid December 2015 and rains have been erratic since the beginning of the farming season. I planted half an acre of my maize crop and all of wilted beyond recovery. I uprooted the damaged maize crop and replanted cowpeas but they barely germinated.

"I am currently receiving two buckets of maize from the World Food Programme (WFP) via local organization Lower Guruve Development Association, but these are not enough for my family. I need at least two more buckets for one month.

"To supplement this food, I am currently selling my limited livestock. I have only two cattle and four goats. I have been living from hand to mouth for the past two years because of the floods which hit Mbire in the recent seasons. We have had two floods for two years and now the heat wave. It is going to be very hard to recover from three years of hunger."

(Note: ActionAid has now introduced the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund to help Clara and the community of Mbire.)

Clara Gurauzive, Bandera village, Mbire in Zimbabwe holds her crops that have been withered by drought.

PHOTO: TAKAITEI BOTE/ ACTIONAID



The worst drought for decades

The 2015-16 El Niño cycle has brought the worst drought and hunger crisis for decades.

By the end of 2015, 30 per cent of the global land area was ‘in drought’, one of the highest figures since modern record keeping began in the 1950s. Some 14 per cent of the planet was in “severe drought”, up from eight per cent at the end of 2014. The area in drought conditions in 2015 was exceeded only by some of the major drought years in the mid-1980s.³⁸ 32 major droughts were recorded around the world in 2015, more than double the ten-year annual average of 15 per year. Although not yet published, the figures are likely to be as high or higher for 2016.

In southern Africa, countries are confronting their worst drought in 35 years.^{39, 40} Ethiopia is enduring its worst drought in 50 years, with nearly 10 million people in need of food assistance.⁴¹ Brazil’s drought in 2015 was its worst in 80 years.⁴² Vietnam has suffered its worst drought in nearly 100 years.⁴³

National emergencies have been declared in Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, and in eight out of nine provinces in South Africa that collectively account for 90 per cent of the country’s maize production. Malawi is experiencing its first maize deficit in a decade and its largest

humanitarian emergency in history, with 6.5 million people in need of humanitarian aid. Mozambique has issued an institutional red alert for its most affected central and southern provinces.⁴⁴ El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the Marshall Islands have also declared national emergencies.

In August 2016, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) identified 19 priority countries that are severely affected by El Niño, mainly by drought and food shortages, and an additional 21 countries also facing drought and/or flood risks.⁴⁵ Countries that have been most severely affected are in Southern Africa, some parts of the Horn of Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, some Pacific islands and parts of Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ In Central America, El Niño conditions have led to a second consecutive year of drought – one of the region’s most severe in history.⁴⁷

In July the FAO and UN World Food Programme (WFP) jointly warned that **at least 60 million people worldwide - about 40 million of them in East and Southern Africa – were estimated to be food insecure due to the impact of El Niño⁴⁸** and that the number of people affected by the combined impacts of the El Niño/La Niña could top 100 million by the end of 2016.⁴⁹ In September, OCHA confirmed that in spite of returning rainfall in some areas, and some humanitarian contributions received, 60 million people are still at significant risk.

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38. Emily Greenhalgh, ‘2015 State of the Climate: Drought’, 2 August 2016 <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/featured-images/2015-state-climate-drought>.
39. FAO, El Niño set to have a devastating impact on southern Africa’s harvests and food security, 12 February 2016, <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/382932/code/>.
40. John Vidal, ‘El Niño is causing global food crisis, UN warns’, 17 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/feb/17/el-nino-leaves-100-million-people-hungry-short-of-water-droughts-floods-worldwide>; Reid Hamel, ‘Drought-Ravaged Malawi Faces Largest Humanitarian Emergency in its History’, 2 August 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/drought-ravaged-malawi-faces-largest-humanitarian-emergency-its-history>.
41. OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2016*, p.3, <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/GHO-2016.pdf>.
42. ‘Brazil’s most populous region facing worst drought in 80 years’, 24 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-30962813>.
43. John Vidal, ‘El Niño is over – but it leaves nearly 100 million people short of food’, 30 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/30/el-nino-is-over-but-it-leaves-nearly-100-million-people-short-of-food>.
44. ‘El Niño: Southern Africa faces its worst drought in 35 years’, 18 July 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/el-ni%C3%B1o-southern-africa-faces-its-worst-drought-35-years>.
45. FAO, *2015–2016 El Niño: Early action and response for agriculture, food security and nutrition*, August 2016, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6049e.pdf>.
46. ‘UN: El Niño shows the need for early action’, 6 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/un-el-nino-shows-need-early-action>.
47. John Vidal, ‘El Niño is causing global food crisis, UN warns’, 17 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/feb/17/el-nino-leaves-100-million-people-hungry-short-of-water-droughts-floods-worldwide>.
48. ‘UN: El Niño shows the need for early action’, 6 July 2016, <http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/un-el-nino-shows-need-early-action>.
49. ‘UN seeks to boost response to El Niño’s dire impact in Africa and Asia/Pacific, urges La Niña preparedness’, 6 July 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/un-seeks-boost-response-el-ni-os-dire-impact-africa-and-asiapacific-urges-la-ni>.

The FAO's figure of 60 million does not reflect the full scale of the problem however, as this only counts the numbers in need of UN support. In April the Indian government reported that 330 million people (over 25 per cent of the population) were affected by drought.⁵⁰ This was recognised by the Indian Meteorological Department as a consequence of El Niño's impact on the 2015 monsoon.⁵¹

Due to the Indian government's own efforts to intervene using national food reserves, social protection schemes and compensation schemes,

these figures were not included in the World Food Programme (WFP's) call for international aid.

The government's rural employment guarantee scheme⁵² has given work to many whose farming livelihoods were affected. However problems with its implementation have been noted, and millions have faced extreme hardship throughout the crisis.⁵³

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) gives data on several countries affected by drought and hunger in the current El Niño emergency:⁵⁴

Table 1: FAO data on countries affected by drought and hunger in the current El Niño emergency (August 2016)

Country	Impact
East Africa	
Djibouti	11,500 pastoralists displaced by drought
Eritrea	1m are food insecure
Ethiopia	9.7m in need of food assistance in 2016
Somalia	4.7 are food insecure
Sudan	1.2m affected by drought
West Africa	
Chad	3.6m are food insecure, 11% more than in 2013 or 2014. 4.3m are projected to become insecure in 2016
Southern Africa	
Angola	1.25m affected by drought
Botswana	49,000 need humanitarian assistance
Lesotho	680,000 people need humanitarian assistance up to May 2017 due to drought
Madagascar	1.4m affected by drought
Malawi	6.5m need emergency assistance up from 2.8m the previous year, due to drought
Mozambique	1.98m in need of emergency assistance due to drought
Namibia	1.5m affected by drought and 720,000 projected to be food insecure by end of 2016/early 2017
South Africa	227,000 households affected by drought, and 14.3m vulnerable to food insecurity in the 2016/17 lean season
Swaziland	638,000 projected to be food insecure in peak 2016/17 lean season due to drought
Zambia	800,000 are food insecure and 976,000 projected to be at the peak of the lean season in 2016/17
Zimbabwe	2.8m food insecure as result of drought, projected to be 4.1m at the peak of the 2016/17 lean season

50. BBC "India drought: 330m people affected" 20 April 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36089377>.

51. Times of India, El Nino may give way to better monsoon in 2016, Feb 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/El-Nino-may-give-way-to-better-monsoon-in-2016/articleshow/51099483.cms>.

52. Indian Express "Modi to spend a record 60,000 crore on what was a UPA flagship scheme" 20 Oct 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/mgnrega-nda-government-pm-modi-employment-days-mgnrega-3092201/>.

53. ActionAid India, Drought 2015-16: Lessons from Desolation, August 2016, http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/drought2015-16_report_ebook.pdf.

54. FAO, 2015-16 El Nino: Early action and response for agriculture, food security and nutrition, August 2016, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6049e.pdf>.

Central America / Caribbean	
Dominican Republic	1.6m affected by drought
Eastern Caribbean (Barbados, Dominica, St Lucia etc)	No figure given
El Salvador	700,000 affected by drought and food insecure
Guatemala	1.5m affected by drought, of which 915,000 are food insecure
Haiti	3.6m are food insecure
Honduras	1.35m affected by drought of which 461,000 are food insecure
Nicaragua	No figure given
South America	
Bolivia	60,000 households affected by cold wave and hail and 130,000 households affected by drought
Columbia	No figure given
Equador	No figure given
Paraguay	7,300 households affected by floods
Peru	489,000 affected by freezing temperatures/snowfall
Asia/Pacific	
Cambodia	189,000 households affected by drought
Fiji	350,000 people affected by Cyclone Winston in February 2016
Indonesia	No figure given
Laos	No figure given
Myanmar	No figure given
North Korea	5,400 households affected by floods
Papua New Guinea	2.7m people affected by drought, frost and forest fires
Philippines	413,000 affected by drought
Timor Leste	350,000 people affected by drought
Vietnam	1.75m have lost their livelihoods due to drought
<i>Total from FAO figures – 69,433,300 people affected</i>	

Table 2: Other countries that have not called for international support include:

Country	Impact
Brazil	4m affected by drought (in 2015) ⁵⁵
China	1m affected by drought (2015) ⁵⁶
India	330m affected by drought ⁵⁷
<i>Total from non-FAO figures – 335 million people affected</i>	

Total from FAO Figures: **69.5 Million**

+

Total from Non-FAO Figures: **335 Million**
= **404.5 MILLION people affected**

By combining these figures, we can conclude that over 400 million people have been affected by drought conditions in 2015-16. This may in fact be the largest global drought crisis that the world has ever experienced.

55. <http://www.ibtimes.com/brazil-drought-worst-water-crisis-80-years-affecting-four-million-people-countrys-1794006>.

56. <http://reliefweb.int/report/china/over-1-million-affected-nw-drought>.

57. 'More Than 300 Million People in India Are Reeling From the Worst Drought in Four Decades', 27 April 2016, <http://time.com/4309156/india-maharashtra-drought-water/>.

ActionAid's programme work in affected countries has found that the impact of El Niño is going beyond causing immediate hunger, and is jeopardising the longer-term prospects for farming, often wiping out livelihoods in the process. Thus the long-term impacts of the crisis may well continue to affect many more people than it has already. It is likely to have particularly damaging outcomes for women smallholder farmers, who make up 43 per cent of developing countries' agricultural labour force.⁵⁸

Falling food production is pushing up the price of staples in many countries, making poor people pay more for food and reducing access to food, thus exacerbating hunger.

- In Malawi, for example, maize production in 2016 has fallen by 40 per cent (compared to the previous five year average) which has caused prices to rise by two-thirds.
- In Zimbabwe, maize production has fallen by a third in 2016 compared to 2015, causing prices to rise by 13 per cent.
- In Lesotho, the situation is even worse – maize production has fallen by 61 per cent, causing prices to rise sharply.⁵⁹
- In Honduras, some 60 per cent of the maize crop was lost in some areas, causing prices to rise by 20 per cent.⁶⁰

Cattle are dying in large numbers across Southern Africa. In Angola, some 360,000 cattle, worth \$345 million, have died due to lack of water

and feed.⁶¹ Zimbabwe has lost over 25,000 cattle worth \$54 million.⁶² In Mozambique some 533,000 cattle are at risk of dying due to drought.⁶³

In their desperation and hunger, many farmers are selling their livestock and poultry, but the crisis is driving livestock prices down. In Zimbabwe, for example, animals that used to fetch some \$500 on the market are being sold for as little as \$50 to buyers from towns and cities.⁶⁴ However as the lean season approaches, prices for staple foods are likely to rise still further.⁶⁵

In many countries women particularly rely on small ruminants such as sheep and goats as a source of independent income that can help feed their families. In Ethiopia, the loss of their livestock and income is having a knock-on effect on local markets and small businesses, which are also predominantly run by women.

Escalating debt in Haiti,⁶⁶ farmer suicides in India⁶⁷ and huge losses in farm incomes in South Africa⁶⁸ have all been reported as a result of the widespread drought.

For some countries the latter part of 2016 has finally brought rains and hopes for a new harvest. But crops recently planted will still take many months to cultivate and millions will likely be hungry until the early months of 2017. Although El Niño's weather may now have passed, its hunger impacts will still be felt for many months.

58. ActionAid, Investing in women smallholder farmers, 2011 http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/policy_briefing_investing_in_women_smallholder_farmers.pdf.

59. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.10-13, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

60. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.23, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

61. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.11, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

62. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.12, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/> 'Government says \$54m worth of livestock lost to drought', 24 March 2016, [http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-28393-\\$54m-worth-of-cattle-lost-to-drought,+govt/news.aspx](http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-28393-$54m-worth-of-cattle-lost-to-drought,+govt/news.aspx).

63. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.8, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

64. 'Drought takes toll on SADC's livestock', 14 March 2016, <http://southernafrican.news/2016/03/14/drought-takes-toll-on-sadcs-livestock/>.

65. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.10, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

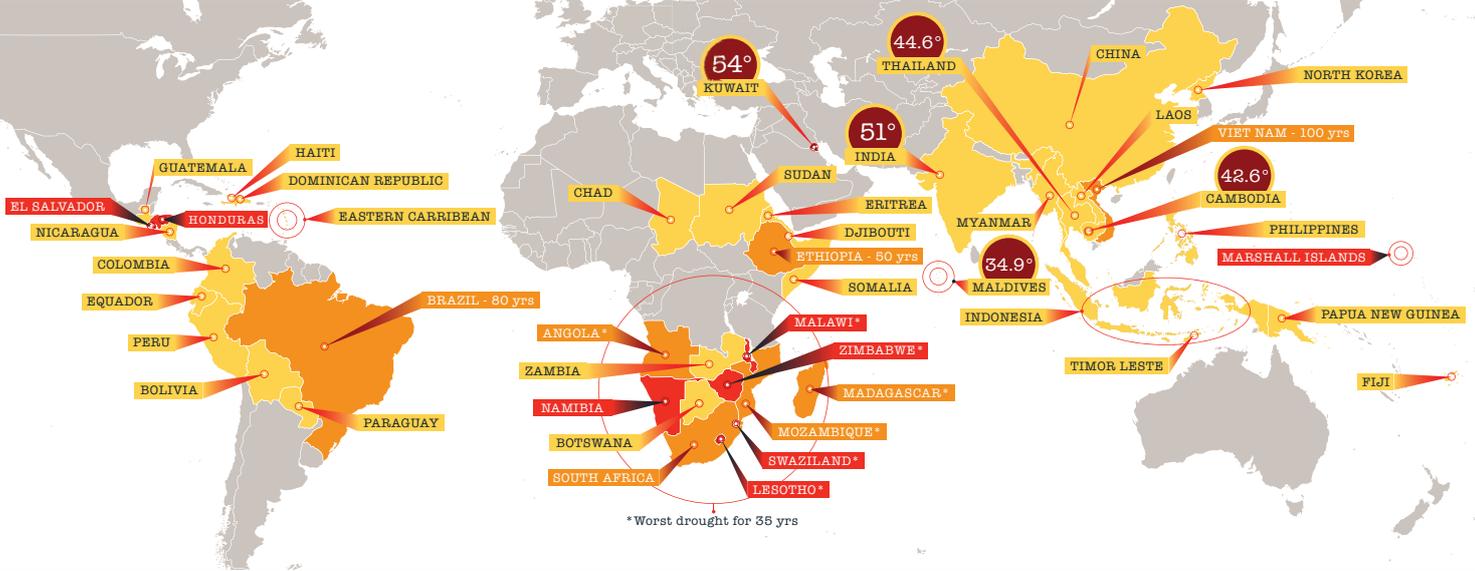
66. FAO, 2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, August 2016, p.21, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/340660/>.

67. 'Drought and debt weigh on India's farmers', 28 April 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20160428-Commodities-crucible/Politics-Economy/Drought-and-debt-weigh-on-India-s-farmers>.

68. 'The high cost of SA's worst drought in 23 years', 8 July 2015, <http://city-press.news24.com/News/The-high-cost-of-SAs-worst-drought-in-23-years-20150708>.

The effects of **El Niño**

- Countries affected by drought and hunger in the 2015/16 El Niño emergency.
- Countries that have had the worst drought in decades.
- Countries that have declared national emergencies.
- Countries showing the highest recorded temperatures in 2016.



Edith Mutama fetches water from the river, Zimbabwe.
PHOTO: JAKOB DALL / ACTIONAID

ActionAid Case Study 2: Water crisis, Ethiopia

"I feel I'm responsible for everyone," says Wubalech Admasu, the young female manager of the district Water Association in one of the worst drought affected areas of Ethiopia. The association is run entirely by women and provides water to the northern town of Merkane Birhan (pop. 30,000) and its surrounding area.

Ethiopia has been suffering from its worst droughts for 50 years. The huge lack of rainfall over the past year has caused severe water shortages across the country.

In Merkane Birhan in the Amhara region, water shortages are biting hard. Since the drought began in mid-2015, the natural springs and boreholes have dried up and are no longer providing the community with enough water.

"The drought is clear in the town. There are now extremely long lines at distribution points," Wublech says of the queues that community members form, along with their jerry cans, at water points in the town. The job of securing clean drinking water for the family is almost always done by women and girls who frequently spend hours on end under the beat of the hot sun.

Wubalech's Water Association estimates that, due to the drought, the town currently has less than half the water it needs. And the situation in more rural areas outside the town is often much more difficult.

In surrounding villages, some women are walking up to 12 hours a day to find water.

"Families have to go and fetch from unclean water sources and people have been suffering because they don't have enough water to be hygienic," Wubalech explains, *"and so they contract water-borne diseases like amoebas and giardia."*

"We are compelled to walk long distances to find rivers to get water. Sometimes when we do not find a water source, we return back home because we are too tired to go further. So we drink whatever is leftover in the house, and try the next day," says Worke Belete, a mother who has travelled into Merkane Birhan to use a water point newly constructed by ActionAid.

Worke Belete has had to travel to Mekane Berhan to find water, Janamora, Ethiopia.
PHOTO: GONZALO GUJARDO/ ACTIONAID



Women are disproportionately affected

With any kind of disaster, women and children are especially vulnerable to the impacts. This is no different during drought events such as those brought about by El Niño. Pre-existing inequalities can make women and children more vulnerable, while the roles, responsibilities and status associated with being a woman can often bring additional burdens and fewer privileges when a disaster strikes.

There has been limited gender analysis to date of the impacts of this El Niño event globally. However, needs assessments carried out by ActionAid country offices in Somaliland, Lesotho and Ethiopia reveal worrying trends, and these are confirmed by further analysis in Ethiopia, Vanuatu, Vietnam and Cambodia.⁶⁹ Negative “coping mechanisms” commonly employed by women and girls have become much more widespread as a result of the El Niño drought.

Women frequently put their children and husbands’ nutrition first during disasters, and are often the last to eat, if there is any food left for them. Many women report only eating one meal a day, and on some days none at all, during disasters so they can ensure their children are adequately fed. An ActionAid needs assessment in Somaliland earlier this year revealed that at least 50% of the women in drought-affected areas were reported to be malnourished.⁷⁰ Other research from Ethiopia showed that adult men are given priority over adult

women in accessing food, including pregnant and lactating women.⁷¹

In the face of crop failure and hungry families, women may look to alternative sources of income such as casual labour, which is low paid and can be highly exploitative or associated with sexual violence. In Malawi and Lesotho,⁷² reports from communities working with ActionAid indicate that some women are resorting to sex work to make ends meet, which puts them at higher risk of violence and HIV/AIDS.⁷³ Child marriages are reported to be on the increase⁷⁴ as young girls are sent away to reduce the financial burden on the family, and possibly because parents are desperate for the resources provided by dowries.

Women and girls are usually responsible for collecting water for the family, a role that has significant consequences in times of drought. In Lesotho, 60 per cent of affected community members interviewed by ActionAid said women and girls take two or three more hours longer each day to find scarce water.⁷⁵ As a result many are forced to miss out on education and income opportunities.

In Vietnam, severe drought has combined with saltwater intrusion into fresh water supplies, forcing women to spend many more hours collecting water for their families.⁷⁶ Women are concerned about the lack of clean water that is affecting sanitation and, particularly during menstruation, increasing their health risks. Similar issues have been noted in nearby Cambodia, where women are particularly outspoken on the impact the drought has had on hygiene within the household.⁷⁷

69. Oxfam International, Consolidated Gender Analysis for the Ethiopian drought response, July 2016, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/consolidated-gender-analysis-for-the-ethiopian-drought-response-620088>.

70. ActionAid, El Niño: The Silent Emergency – Trusting Women’s Leadership in Responding to the Crisis, July 2016 <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/elniñosilentemergency.pdf>.

71. Oxfam International, Consolidated Gender Analysis for the Ethiopian drought response, July 2016, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/consolidated-gender-analysis-for-the-ethiopian-drought-response-620088>.

72. Illegal activities such as prostitution were reported as the most common coping livelihoods strategy by 66.7 per cent of the Focus Group Discussion Rapid Assessment report on the effects of El Niño in Lesotho (unpublished), ActionAid Lesotho, 12 February 2016.

73. UNICEF, It’s Not Over: El Niño’s Impact on Children, July 2016 http://www.unicef.pt/briefing_note_El_Niño.pdf.

74. Reuters, El Niño driving child marriage and labour across Southern Africa, 20 July 2016, <http://news.trust.org/item/20160720153333-mtf0v/>.

75. ActionAid, El Niño: The Silent Emergency – Trusting Women’s Leadership in Responding to the Crisis, July 2016 <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/elniñosilentemergency.pdf>.

76. <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/07/korea-partnership-helps-women>.

77. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/csp_report_on_rapid_assessment_on_drought_in_koh_kong_ab_revised_version_3.pdf.

In Vanuatu, a prolonged El Niño arrived just as communities were trying to rebuild and recover from the impacts of Cyclone Pam. In the year after the cyclone, the extended drought period prevented the replanting of essential crops, causing months of crop failure that hit women especially hard. This resulted in a shortage of food for their families and decimated women's already tenuous livelihoods as market vendors.⁷⁸

During disasters, men often leave to find alternative sources of income, leaving women to continue their daily work with the added imposition of caring for the household and taking care of the farm and livestock on their own. Children, particularly girls, are then taken out of school to reduce costs and to assist at home or earn an income. Women-headed households are often far more vulnerable than male-headed households during drought as they bear the entire burden of supporting their family alone, and cannot travel to receive assistance or find a job, as it is difficult to bring the whole family in search of alternative work.⁷⁹

As a result of lower education levels and differences in social mobility between men and women, women are often excluded from accessing information that can assist them in preparing for disasters, such as early warning systems.⁸⁰ This further entrenches power imbalances between men and women, and undermines women's efforts to build their resilience. Limited mobility also reduces women's ability to access vital services in disaster situations, such as markets, health clinics and maternal care.⁸¹ The lack of land rights for women smallholder farmers also makes it particularly difficult for them to build their resilience to events such as El Niño. Without land rights, women are unable to access capital to grow their businesses,⁸² and as a result may have little savings or ability to take loans in a

drought. This lack of capital means they are often unable to invest sufficiently in their land and farming practices to resist disasters when they strike.

Access to savings and loans schemes would allow women to manage risk through the El Niño period but very few have this opportunity. Women farmers are also faced with difficult dilemmas in times of drought, such as whether to plant food or cash crops to support the family, and this dilemma can also be made more acute as men and women sometimes have different priorities for their families in a crisis.

Gender inequalities in society also mean unequal status and power for women, and this plays out in ways that can have profound consequences. Women often have limited decision-making power, limited or no access to community decision-making, and are often invisible in national policymaking.⁸³ This means that the needs and priorities of women in disasters like El Niño are often overlooked, preventing them from increasing their resilience.

For these and many other reasons, ActionAid is a strong champion of women's leadership in resilience, disaster preparedness and response strategies.⁸⁴ **Women leaders are recognized as being able to reach all parts of a community. They must be active participants in decision-making, planning processes and disaster response delivery.** They have a critical role to play in making resilience, disaster preparedness and response more effective by addressing the barriers facing those in their communities who are most marginalized. By challenging gender stereotypes, they can help to shift power and eventually to transform gender relations. Disasters can thus provide a strategic opportunity to challenge these inequalities and initiate transformative shifts in power.

78. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2016/5/photo-vanuatu-women-recover-after-cyclone-pam>.

79. Oxfam International, Consolidated Gender Analysis for the Ethiopian drought response, July 2016, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/consolidated-gender-analysis-for-the-ethiopian-drought-response-620088>.

80. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2014), The South Asia Women's Resilience Index. Examining the role of women in preparing for and recovering from disasters. Available from <http://www.economistinsights.com/infrastructure-cities/analysis/south-asia-womensresilience-index>.

81. *ibid.*

82. ActionAid, From marginalisation to empowerment, 2013, http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/from_marginalisation_to_empowerment_final_research_report.pdf.

83. ActionAid, On the Frontline: Catalysing Women's Leadership in Humanitarian Action, May 2016, http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/on_the_frontline_catalysing_womens_leadership_in_humanitarian_action.pdf.

84. ActionAid "El Niño: The Silent Emergency - Trusting women's leadership in responding to the crisis" July 2016 <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/elniñosilentemergency.pdf>.

ActionAid Case Study 3: Girls losing education – Kombolcha – Ethiopia

“Because of the drought, my family was unable to support me in education,” explains 15 year old Chaltu who was forced to drop out of school because of the El Niño-induced drought. In Ethiopia, the drought has led to crops failing, livestock death and over ten million people in need of food aid. The knock-on effect is on girls like Chaltu whose family, facing the added financial strain of finding food, could no longer afford to pay for the costs of education.

“Last year the rain was not here so my family wasn’t able to get money to pay for education. I felt very sad because I had been in school for eight years, it was a very sad moment for me. I was very eager to continue my education and I was missing my friends,” she adds.

Chaltu is not alone, at her high school in the east of Ethiopia a total of 239 students have dropped out in the past year, amounting to roughly a fifth of the school population of 1158. The drop outs are thought to be connected to the drought and the sharp drop in families’ income.

Chaltu is now back at her lessons. But she says “It’s not fair that I had to drop out of school and my brothers didn’t. We have equal rights with boys therefore I also have the right to attend education. I think it is very challenging for girls who are out of school. To teach a girl is to teach a whole society. We need to have better role models and we also have to be an example for other girls.”



Chaltu (right) and her stepmother Amina. Girls like Chaltu have been forced to drop out of school due to the drought in Ethiopia.
PHOTO: GONZALO GUJARDO/ ACTIONAID

An insufficient international response

Since late 2015 rains have failed, crops have withered, and millions of families have been hungry and thirsty in dozens of countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Women have been worst hit. Instead of taking early action when the signs were clear in 2015, many affected countries waited until 2016 to launch appeals. Local, national and international humanitarian agencies put out clear warnings, and then increasingly desperate calls for international support to deal with the crisis.

But the 2015-16 El Niño crisis has been met with little finance, and even less attention.

OCHA has requested total funding of \$5.1 billion for governments and international agencies to address the immediate humanitarian impacts of El Niño, based on costed plans put forward by over two dozen countries. Further analysis will be needed for the requirements to address longer-term socio-economic impacts.

Yet as of September 2016, only US\$1.9 billion has been made available. Thus **only 37 per cent of the global need has been met, and a funding gap of \$3.1 billion remains.**⁸⁵ This is particularly low considering that most of the appeals have been out for more than a year, and the crisis predicted for nearly two years. According to OCHA, this funding gap leaves 60 million people 'at significant risk of further loss'.⁸⁶

Although the El Niño weather event has been declared over, the danger has certainly not passed. According to OCHA, **food insecurity linked to crop failure and drought is not expected to**

peak until well into 2017.⁸⁷ Tens of millions of people are still in need of assistance, and the majority of these are women, children and the elderly.

Food and non-food assistance are still urgently needed to support agriculture, health, nutrition and food security. In particular, the livelihoods of millions of small-scale farmers, particularly women farmers, on whom most countries depend for their family and national nutrition, are still at risk. With seeds, livestock and savings gone, many families will struggle to recover their original source of livelihood and food security.

To avoid a protracted emergency into late 2017/ early 2018, resilience building, livelihood recovery and preparation activities for the next agricultural season that target women need to be prioritized and implemented as part of El Niño response-and-recovery efforts, in parallel with preparedness efforts for a possible La Niña event.⁸⁸



Crop failure means that families in Makoni district, Zimbabwe must resort to feeding their children on boiled bananas.

PHOTO: DESMOND KWANDE/ ACTIONAID

85. OCHA, El Niño: Overview of Impact, Project Humanitarian Needs and Response, September 2016, pp.25-6, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA_ElNino_Monthly_Report_Sept2016_0.pdf.

86. OCHA, El Niño: Overview of Impact, Project Humanitarian Needs and Response, September 2016, p.2, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA_ElNino_Monthly_Report_Sept2016_0.pdf.

87. 'Climate Change - Humanitarian Impact', <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/advocacy/thematic-campaigns/climate-change/humanitarian-impact>.

88. OCHA, El Niño: Overview of Impact, Projected Humanitarian Needs and Response, August 2016, p.15, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA_ElNino_Monthly_Report_16Aug2016.pdf.

Section 3

Climate-induced humanitarian crises: lessons for the “new normal”

ActionAid Case Study 4: Agroecology brings resilience - Malawi

In 2015 Lucy Sinkhani of Kanangwanji village in Malawi joined a training provided by ActionAid in collaboration with the Coalition of Women Farmers. The training included agro-ecological techniques that enable agriculture to become resilient to climate change.

“The training opened my eyes to simple but useful techniques. We learned to create mulch from grasses and bushes. We were shown how to apply the mulch all over the garden. We were advised not to till the garden, but instead during the planting season we were taught to make small holes in which to plant the maize seed,” she explains. “This time during planting season I did not construct ridges in my garden. Instead I dug holes where I planted. This way the soil was not disturbed.”

The 2015-2016 growing season started well but the effects of El Niño slowly started creeping in. At a crucial time when maize was about to start tasseling there was no rain. As a result of the drought caused by El Niño, Neno district experienced terrible crop failure. Hundreds of households watched helplessly as maize wilted in their gardens. In Malawi and several countries in the southern Africa region, millions of farmers and their families faced severe hunger, and a state of emergency was declared.

However Lucy’s story was different. The techniques that Lucy used meant that her crops were able to survive on just a small amount of rainfall.

“When it rained the soil kept the moisture, and the mulch was like a blanket making sure the moisture did not evaporate. Weeds were suffocated by the mulch. My garden did not suffer like the rest of the community. It remained green and the stalks were strong.”

“I will harvest a normal yield of eight (50kg) bags of maize. Many people will harvest a third of normal harvest. Thanks to ActionAid, from a simple practice I will get staggering results considering this has been a year of poor rainfall.”

With climate change on the increase, disasters such as the 2015-16 drought are becoming the “new normal”.

Key lessons must be learned, and a range of technical, financial and political actions are needed now and for the future.

1) The need to invest in resilience

The impacts of El Niño highlight yet again the need for much better preparedness to enhance the

resilience of poor women and their communities to the impacts of climate change. The capacity of national and local actors – and particularly women leaders⁸⁹ - to prepare for and reduce the impact of disasters, must be reinforced, heralding a shift towards more national and locally-led responses.⁹⁰

The lessons from El Niño, La Niña and other climate events should not, however, just be about humanitarian response. The focus should also be on human-rights based development that prioritises adaptation, prevention and preparedness.

89. ActionAid, Women’s rights and leadership in humanitarian action, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens-rights-leadership-humanitarian-action.pdf>.

90. ‘Averting disasters by being prepared’, 16 September 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/averting-disasters-being-prepared>.

Addressing chronic underlying vulnerabilities can go a long way towards preventing recurrent and predictable crises.⁹¹

Vulnerable countries should significantly increase their investment and training in key strategies such as disaster risk reduction, risk assessments, early warning systems, emergency response systems, social protection and agro-ecological and climate-resilient sustainable agriculture techniques.

As women are more vulnerable to disasters⁹² and are disproportionately impacted, these countries must also design strategies (including disaggregated data collection) using a gender-sensitive lens that ensures they meet the specific needs of women. Increasing their leadership and participation in planning and delivery at all levels is key to effective adaptation, preparedness and relief activities.

There is overwhelming evidence that preparedness is one of the most effective ways to help prevent people from ending up in crisis. **According to OCHA, every \$1 invested in emergency preparedness saves \$7 that would otherwise be spent on emergency response.**⁹³ In 2009 countries at the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's (UNISDR) Global Platform on Disaster Reduction recommended that one per cent of their overseas development assistance (ODA), and ten per cent of humanitarian aid should go towards disaster risk reduction.

In order to make these critical investments, vulnerable countries desperately need international financial support. Yet international aid to support disaster risk reduction is grossly insufficient. Recent data is lacking but in 2012, only two donors out of 24 spent ten per cent or more of their

humanitarian aid budgets on disaster prevention and preparedness and only three allocated more than one per cent of their development expenditure. However much of this, particularly from Japan (the largest ODA contributor to disaster risk reduction spending), was in the form of loans instead of grants.⁹⁴ Overall, it is estimated that only three per cent of official humanitarian aid was spent on disaster prevention and preparedness during 2006-10.⁹⁵

Current levels of international funding for climate change are also failing to meet the gap, or consider the impact on women. Donor countries tend to give developing countries far more funds for mitigation purposes (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions) than adaptation (to help vulnerable countries cope with the impacts), which further disadvantages women on the climate frontline.



Elen Muswere in her maize field which failed due to drought in Makoni district, Zimbabwe.

PHOTO: DESMOND KWANDE/ ACTIONAID

91. ActionAid, Through a different Lens: ActionAid's resilience framework, August 2016, <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/through-different-lens-actionaids-resilience-framework>.

92. ActionAid, Women's Resilience Index – Bangladesh, http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/wri_toolkit.pdf.

93. 'Climate Change - Humanitarian Impact', <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/advocacy/thematic-campaigns/climate-change/humanitarian-impact>.

94. Global Humanitarian Assistance, Aid Investments in Disaster Risk Reduction: Rhetoric to Action, 2012, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Aid-investments-in-disaster-risk-reduction-rhetoric-to-action-Dan-Sparks1.pdf>.

95. 'Averting disasters by being prepared', 16 September 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/averting-disasters-being-prepared>.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Climate Policy Initiative (CPI), of \$62 billion mobilised in public and private climate finance in 2014, just one sixth of the funds were targeted for adaptation compared to three quarters for mitigation, with a small share targeting both.⁹⁶ However, much of this has been in the form of loans, which ActionAid and many civil society allies do not believe is appropriate for adaptation finance.⁹⁷ Furthermore, much of this did not have adaptation as its principle objective, resulting in gross over-counting of adaptation finance. Our own analysis suggests that just \$3-5 billion in grants went towards adaptation in 2013.⁹⁸ But the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) estimates that \$140-300 billion will likely be needed for adaptation every year by 2030.⁹⁹

Developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, are in the process of writing National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to scale up their adaptation efforts. This provides a key opportunity to take a comprehensive and joined-up approach on issues of adaptation, development, resilience, preparedness and response. Many are also in the process of implementing UNISDR recommendations under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. These might usefully be streamlined with NAPs effort, for example in the development of baselines by 2020 so that on-going efforts can be monitored effectively.

Many countries still lack the internal capacity to even develop effective adaptation plans and are struggling to develop adaptation proposals for the new global mechanism for climate finance transfers under the UNFCCC, known as the Green Climate Fund (GCF). **The international community must therefore be willing to provide its fair share¹⁰⁰**

of climate finance to support capacity building and adaptation strategies. With the GCF introducing a gender quality policy for all investments,¹⁰¹ there is now some promise that such finance can provide a much-needed boost to women's resilience.

2) Taking early action

This El Niño crisis was both predictable and preventable. It is unacceptable that, as often happens with drought and slow onset crises, the response has been too little, too late.

Early warning systems and forecasts have improved greatly in recent years. In spite of this, several governments in affected countries were slow to recognise the needs of their citizens and declare emergencies. The main blockage to an adequate and timely response was, however, the political reluctance and international donors' aversion to mobilise resources and funds early enough to make a real difference.

It is clear that early action saves lives. Money is key to all of this, enabling countries, agencies and local organisations to carry out timely activities such as cash transfers, destocking, rehabilitating water points, training farmers, and distributing the means to access clean drinking water and hygiene for example with jerry cans, water purification tablets and soap.¹⁰² Activities delivered by local organisations can help to ensure that capacity and leadership is built in and stays in communities, that the needs of the communities are fully understood and responded to, and that their voices are heard in advocacy opportunities.

96. <http://www.OECD.org/environment/cc/OECD-CPI-Climate-Finance-Report.pdf>.

97. Joint civil society letter to Ministers, 7 October 2015, http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/877/db/1/6591/10-6-15_clim_fin_actgt_sign_on_F.PDF, ActionAid "Mind the Adaptation Gap" November 2015 http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/mind_the_adaptation_gap_final_v2.pdf.

98. ActionAid "Mind the Adaptation Gap" November 2015 http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/mind_the_adaptation_gap_final_v2.pdf.

99. UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2016 <http://web.unep.org/adaptationgapreport/sites/unep.org.adaptationgapreport/files/documents/agr2016.pdf>.

100. ActionAid "Mind the Adaptation Gap" November 2015 http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/mind_the_adaptation_gap_final_v2.pdf.

101. Green Climate Fund, Gender Policy and Action Plan, October 2014, https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/24946/GCF_B.08_19_-_Gender_Policy_and_Action_Plan.pdf/afd29fd9-3efa-41c3-8318-7d86587c7701.

102. Oxfam, Early action on super-charged El Niño vital to save lives, December 2015 <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/Early%20Action%20on%20Super%20Charged%20El%20Ni%20vital%20to%20Save%20Lives%20Oxfam.pdf>.

From late 2015 until early 2016, local organisations and humanitarian agencies gave increasingly desperate warnings and pleas for assistance. Funds given at this time would have made a great impact, enabling governments and agencies to make strategic preparations relating to water, food and livestock. But in spite of the pleas, the international donor community gave very little in the early part of 2016. This seems to be due to a common trend of waiting to provide international contributions until crisis point is reached. At this point, the emergency is in the media spotlight, and contributions made can generate more publicity. But the tragic **delay means that lives are lost and the impact of the drought is far greater.**

Between July and September 2016, as the crisis reached its worst point yet, more funds did arrive, enabling actors to provide some meaningful support. While these were greatly needed, they had less impact than if they had been provided earlier when the initial alarm was raised.

Greater efforts and coordination are therefore required at local, national and international level to ensure more effective early action and fundraising that can help to minimise the impact of future climate-induced disasters.

In May 2016, the UN Secretary General appointed two UN Special Envoys on El Niño¹⁰³ in recognition of the scale of the current disaster and the need to learn lessons to avoid future similar crises. With input from a range of humanitarian agencies they are developing a "Blueprint for Action"¹⁰⁴ which can provide key guidance for preparing for future El Niño and La Niña events. Useful Elements include integrating climate-proofing into development

investment, strengthening early warning and actions, creating more effective mechanisms to support vulnerable people, and encouraging collaboration and capacity building. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)¹⁰⁵ for dealing with future El Niño/ La Niña events are also being jointly developed by the FAO, WFP and OCHA.

Many of these developments are highly welcome. However, when finalised and implemented, they must have a locally-led and women-centred approach that recognises their greater vulnerability and ability to lead recovery. They must target the poorest people (often women) and ensure that they have a voice in agreeing thresholds for action and implementing activities. Specific endorsement of climate resilient-sustainable agriculture strategies and universal social protection programmes should be at the centre of the strategy.

3) Strengthening collaboration between climate & humanitarian bodies

The failure to recognise and respond to the global El Niño crisis as one of the largest-ever climate-induced emergencies has exposed a sharp disconnect between climate change and humanitarian bodies. In a world where climate-induced humanitarian crises are increasingly the "new normal", and where countries have agreed – in theory – to work together to respond, these silos are failing vulnerable people, especially women and girls. While effective inter-agency collaboration between the FAO, WFP and OCHA has been clearly evident over the course of the crisis, the climate change dimension was noticeably lacking.

103. UN, SG appoints Mary Robinson of Ireland, Macharia Kamau of Kenya as Special Envoys in El Niño and Climate, 26 May 2016 <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sga1660.doc.htm>.

104. <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/high-level-event-responding-impacts-el-nino-and-mitigating-recurring-climate-risks/>.

105. FAO: Human security and El Niño/ La Niña http://www.un.org/humansecurity/sites/www.un.org/humansecurity/files/hsu-fao_policy_brief_on_el_nino_sept_2016.pdf.

In response to the crisis in the region, ActionAid Somaliland has distributed food relief for drought-affected families.

PHOTO: VIBEK RAJ MAURYA



Promising initial work to address these gaps can be built on. Under the UNFCCC, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) is already beginning to reach out to humanitarian agencies such as OCHA and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), working together to understand and develop strategies for risk management and resilience. Elements from the “Blueprint for Action” and the UN’s Standard Operating Procedures can provide input into WIM discussions. These are specifically targeted at El Niño and La Niña events, but their approaches can and must be broadened to deal with a range of climate crises.

Coordination between humanitarian and climate agencies will be necessary, so this important progress must continue. Further collaborative activities including joint assessments and joint working group must also be explored.

4) Climate justice and historical responsibility for humanitarian crises

Climate change disproportionately affects the world’s poorest people, particularly women and girls. It is now one of the greatest obstacles to ending impoverishment and inequality and to realising full human rights. According to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) 90 per cent of disasters are weather-related. The incidence of weather-related disasters in the last decade is now double that of the 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Climate change is clearly driving this trend.

It is now widely accepted that industrialization and particularly overconsumption and overexploitation of resources have been the key drivers of this global phenomenon. Countries and elites that have been industrializing, polluting and getting richer for longer have the most historical responsibility for creating greenhouse gas emissions that are heating the planet.¹⁰⁷

106. UNISDR, The Human Cost of Weather Related Disasters 1995-2015, https://www.unisdr.org/2015/docs/climatechange/COP21_WeatherDisastersReport_2015_FINAL.pdf.

107. Fair Shares: A civil society equity review of INDCs, November 2015, http://civilsocietyreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CSO_FullReport.pdf

The deep injustice is that those countries and communities that are most vulnerable to climate impacts such as droughts, floods, storms, sea level rise and typhoons, are usually the least responsible for causing them. These communities urgently need support to enhance their resilience by adapting, preparing, raising the alarm and responding. But with insufficient mitigation at global level and inadequate adaptation at local level, many countries also face climate-induced "loss and damage". This can include permanent loss (e.g. of lives, species and habitats) as well as damage (such as buildings, roads and embankments).¹⁰⁸

Because of this injustice, rich countries have a moral obligation to support poorer countries in adapting to and coping with a crisis not of their making. Climate justice requires developed countries to provide support to developing countries for adaptation and dealing with climate impacts.

Currently, when wealthy countries provide humanitarian aid, they do so on a principle of moral obligation, based on needs. But these disasters are taking place as a direct consequence of rich nations' climate-polluting actions. Their **moral obligation to provide humanitarian support must be reinforced by their historical responsibility for causing climate change.**

5) The current crisis is not over

Even though the peak of the El Niño weather event has now passed, its **impacts are still increasing. Humanitarian agencies still face a funding shortfall of \$3.1 billion in order to meet the anticipated need through 2016 and 2017. 60 million people are still at risk.**¹⁰⁹ They will continue to face hunger, malnutrition, thirst, exhaustion, and loss of livelihoods every day for many months to come. Some countries, particularly those in southern Africa, may have to wait until June-July 2017 before their next main harvest.

2015-16 has witnessed a climate-related humanitarian crisis that has affected 30 per cent of the planet, in which the heaviest burden has been borne by women. But **the international silence and limited funding support to deal with this has put the world to shame.**

Whatever media or political attention there was has moved on. But the delay before crops can be harvested means that many millions of people will still be desperately hungry.

Donor countries, who are themselves largely responsible for climate change, urgently need to step up to meet the huge humanitarian funding gap, to address the agonising hunger that millions of people are facing now and for the months still to come.

108. ActionAid, CARE, WWF, November 2015, Loss and Damage: Climate Reality in the 21st Century. <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/loss-and-damage-climate-reality-21st-century>

109. OCHA, El Niño: Overview of Impact, Project Humanitarian Needs and Response, September 2016.

Section 4

Conclusion and Recommendations

The insufficient response to the global 2015-16 El Niño drought has been shocking, particularly in the year following the world’s excitement about the Paris Agreement on climate change. While urgent action to address and mitigate climate change is clearly needed, the disaster has highlighted the need to learn many lessons. These include the need to invest much more in resilience, the need for early action to avoid a spiralling crisis, the need to engage women and local communities in resilience and response activities, and the need for a more joined-up approach between humanitarian and climate actions.

As the impacts of climate change are felt hardest by the countries who have least responsibility for creating the problem, a fair shares approach to climate justice can provide guidance for appropriate levels of humanitarian aid and boost support for the most vulnerable.

And as the UNFCCC continues its celebration and ratification of the newly-formed Paris Agreement, the millions that are still hungry must not be forgotten.

The international community and national governments must take a series of urgent steps to address the current and future climate crisis:

Recommendations:

1) Strengthen resilience

- Governments in vulnerable countries must scale up their efforts to strengthen resilience to and preparedness for climate shocks, for example through National Adaptation Plans, implementation of the Sendai Framework recommendations on disaster risk reduction, and development of adaptation proposals to the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

- Donor countries must increase their financial grant contributions to support adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts, for example through the GCF and bilateral channels.
- Resilience and response strategies must shift power to local communities, promoting and resourcing women-led activities, to ensure that local voices are heard and the particular impacts on women are addressed.

2) Improve early action

- Donor countries must commit to rapidly mobilising far more funds for early action, in order to effectively reduce the scale and impact of crises in affected countries.
- Vulnerable countries should draw from elements of the UN special envoys’ “Blueprint for Early Action” and the FAO’s upcoming Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in their national planning and action, and implement these with a locally-led and gender-responsive approach.

3) Strengthen collaboration between climate & humanitarian bodies

- Break down the silos between climate & humanitarian agencies, for example through conducting joint assessments or working groups to consider ways to highlight climate change impacts in future humanitarian crises.
- The Warsaw International Mechanism should consider integrating aspects of the “Blueprint for Early Action” under their current discussions.
- The Blueprint and SOPs can be further strengthened, and their approach applied to all future climate crises.

4) Respond to climate-induced humanitarian disasters with climate justice principles:

- Wealthy countries' moral obligation to make financial contributions to respond to climate-induced humanitarian crises must be reinforced by their historical responsibility for causing climate change.
- Humanitarian finance must not be double-counted, but transparently reflected in commitments to either humanitarian, adaptation or development aid.

5) Meet the needs of the current El Niño crisis

- Donor countries must urgently meet the \$3.1 billion funding gap to deal with the current impacts of the El Niño crisis.
- Women and girls must be prioritised in the response, as they are the most vulnerable to El Niño impacts and their leadership is key to building resilience.
- All countries, agencies and donors must keep a close eye on La Niña developments, undertake preparations where appropriate, and be prepared to respond rapidly should a new crisis develop.



In western Somaliland, Shamsa's family was struggling to feed themselves adequately. Through support from ActionAid Somaliland, she was able to purchase livestock which has provided her with a steady income. She is now chair of her local women's group.
PHOTO: JENNIFER HUXTA/ACTIONAID

ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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