

Famine should not exist in 2022, yet Somalia faces its worst yet. Wealthy countries should pay their dues

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More than a quarter of a million people [died of hunger in Somalia](#) in 2011—half of them children younger than five. The situation in Somalia

in the coming months [could be a great deal worse](#), despite [global commitments](#) to never let the 2011 famine happen again.

The [United Nations predicts](#) more than 300,000 people in Somalia will be in famine by December.

Somalia is home to [16 million people](#) and has a rich history reaching back to before the Roman Empire. Somali people were [producing beautiful rock art](#) in the third millennium BC, [trading with Ancient Egypt](#) and establishing [important masjids and mosques](#) in Mogadishu from the 7th and 13th Centuries onwards.

More recently, however, the people of Somalia have endured wars, [locust plagues](#), flash flooding, pandemics and, now, [extreme drought](#). Today, crisis on top of crisis means [7 million people](#) are in need of humanitarian assistance—[two million more](#) than just three months ago.

Despite historic levels of drought and hunger, [Somali civil](#) society continues to find ways to support people at risk of starvation. But additional help is needed. To date, the [international community](#) has [largely failed the Somali population](#). In 2022, the risk of famine should not exist.

Defining 'famine'

There is a well established and globally recognized [system](#) of categorizing how close to famine people are. "Famine" is the worst of five levels.

[For an area to be declared](#) in a "famine", there must be hard evidence of very high levels of child malnutrition (over 30%), very high levels of death (for every 10,000 people, more than two people dying every day), and extreme levels of hunger (more than one in five households going

without food).

In 2022, no-one should suffer from a lack of food, let alone extreme starvation: [the world is producing more food than ever before](#). And in 2011, humanitarian aid agencies and [civil society](#) organizations launched the [Charter to End Extreme Hunger](#) at the UN in New York, clearly outlining five steps to take to avoid famine.

Since then, it has been endorsed by [the UN](#), [world leaders](#), and dozens of humanitarian organizations.

So why is this happening again?

The past [four rainy seasons](#) in Somalia have failed to materialize and the fifth is very likely to underperform as well.

Crops [can't grow](#) to their full potential, if at all in some areas. The camel, goat and cattle herds of Somali pastoralists [don't have enough vegetation](#) to eat nor enough accessible water to drink—already, [millions of livestock](#) have perished in the current drought.

Climate change underpins this continued lack of rainfall. Somalia is ranked [second-most vulnerable](#) (after Niger) to the adverse impacts of climate change, which [will likely cause](#) Somalia to experience more drought, affecting more land area, with fewer regular rainy seasons.

The extreme difficulties of prolonged drought are hard for anyone to cope with, especially if there is little to no safety net to catch people during hard times. Indeed, food prices [are higher now](#) than during the 2011 famine.

Somalia does have a nascent social safety net called [Baxnaano](#). It aims to build a bridge beyond the humanitarian approach, addressing immediate

food security and nutrition issues, while also laying the foundations for a stronger workforce. But it is still at the pilot stage.

["The country is divided in three"](#): south-central Somalia, the self-declared independent region of Somaliland, and the autonomous state of Puntland in the north. The various governments are not able to reach some parts of the country or provide adequate safety nets for Somalis experiencing the harsh challenges of a changing climate."

That said, some lessons have been learned by Somali governments from previous disasters. In 2021, the [National Desert Locust Monitoring and Control Centre](#) was established, along with the [Drought Operations Coordination Center](#) in Puntland, which predicts upcoming droughts and climate extremes.

This center and [many others](#) warned Somalis and the world of the seriousness of the predicted drought back in early 2020. They have continued to [repeat these warnings](#) as the situation deteriorated.

These warnings fell on largely deaf ears until only very recently. The coordinated plan to respond to the Somali crisis had received [only US\\$56 million](#) in March, but needs US\$1.5 billion to be properly implemented.

While the international community's efforts have ramped up in recent months, the plan to provide life-saving support [is still missing US\\$409 million](#).

What needs to change?

Between October and December, the drought is expected to force 6.7 million people across Somalia into [acute food insecurity](#), a technical term meaning people are close to starving.

International assistance needed to be provided at scale when the first warnings were shared. This was [clearly stated back in 2011](#).

This includes supporting preventative and [resilience-building initiatives](#), such as [rehabilitating water points](#) and [establishing mini greenhouses](#). Such initiatives will enable Somalis to help others prepare for difficult times and get through the worst impacts of the changing climate.

And, perhaps most importantly, wealthy countries should compensate Somalis for the catastrophic impacts climate change is having on their lives.

This compensation—known as "loss and damage financing" in UN circles—[will be a central topic](#) at the upcoming international climate change summit [COP27](#), held in Egypt in November.

[Loss and damage](#) refers to climate change harms that can't be prevented, mitigated, or sometimes even prepared for. Think rising sea levels destroying entire ways of life, or disasters that are happening so often, so severely, that even insurance companies refuse to insure people against them.

Somalis produce [a tiny, tiny amount](#) of greenhouse gas emissions compared to the high-income countries of the world. Yet, they are experiencing some of the worst impacts of climate change, as the current [drought](#) and hunger crisis so clearly demonstrates.

COP27 should lead to Somalis, and the many millions more around the world hit hard by [climate change](#), being financially compensated by the countries and corporations most responsible for changing the climate.

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