

Protecting People in the Midst of Famine:

## Responding to Urgent Risks in the Horn of Africa

### Dangerously low levels of funding for life-saving activities in the Horn of Africa

*Many of the six million girls and boys affected by the current crisis across the Horn of Africa face serious and evolving threats to their safety and well being.*

*Humanitarian agencies have expertise in providing child protection responses to address these life-threatening concerns, but funding for child protection across the region is critically insufficient accounting for the lowest among all other sectors of the response.*

### The enormity of current threats to girls and boys

In Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, though the child protection situation is different in each country context, parents are struggling to provide adequate care for their children. Structures that usually protect children from harm such as extended family and community are breaking down, and children are at increasing risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Different patterns of risk are evolving in each country context.

**Child abandonment:** There are reports of an increase in the numbers of children living on the streets in towns such as those in Turkana (Kenya). These children may have little means for survival and are at very high risk.

**Child separation:** Some children in drought affected areas across the region are left with relatives or in institutions as parents move in search of pasture or food. Some are just left alone without caregivers. In this rapidly evolving situation, separations can become permanent. Prevention of separation is an urgent priority, and family tracing must be immediately initiated for separated children.

**Rape of girls and other sexual violence:** There are reports of bandits and armed actors committing rapes and sexual violence against girls during displacement. The threat of sexual violence, including against boys, is also high.

**Adopting damaging survival strategies including sale of young girls into marriage as a consequence of the loss of livelihood opportunities by families.** In Habaswein, North Eastern Kenya, girls may be sold in order to provide for other children.

**Psychosocial complications and health risks:** Typically, in nutrition crises parents and caregivers are unable to provide sufficient emotional care for their children due to their own poor physical and mental health, which endangers children's development and mental health and survival. In babies and toddlers this may lead to permanent developmental damage.

**Increasing numbers of children engaging in hazardous work** in order to survive – for example construction work; collecting scrap metal; and working in the fishing industry. Girls in some contexts such as the district of Ijara in Kenya are forced to work as 'house helps'. Others have to stay home and take on the duties of absent parents. There is also a high risk of sexual exploitation and transactional or 'survival' sex.

# How can we ensure protection for children in the Horn of Africa?

- **Double current funding allocations for child protection activities immediately.** Develop plans to further increase allocation over the coming months, as part of overall response strategies.
- Ensure that child protection responses reach boys and girls in all families affected by the crisis, including the long term displaced, those who have stayed in their place of origin and those in host communities throughout the affected region.
- Ensure that families are aware that children who they leave alone or in the care of others may suffer serious neglect and harm, or death. Families must receive adequate nutritional and livelihoods support to prevent and address root causes of separation.
- Ensure that separated children, including street children and children who have left their families to find work, have adequate care and that local and cross border family tracing and reunification efforts start immediately.
- Ensure that children and families are aware of the dangers of family separation, and that they receive adequate nutritional and livelihoods support to prevent and address root causes of separation.
- Advocate for community based care alternatives, such as family care, rather than orphanages and other institutional care.
- Ensure that aid is safe. All humanitarians should implement codes of conduct. Timing and means of distribution should not lead to children being left alone, becoming separated, or otherwise placed at risk.
- Include psychosocial support in nutrition, education and health responses.
- Provide accessible multi-sector responses, including psychosocial support, for girls and boys who have suffered sexual violence and other types of violence; and for those who have lost family members or have had other traumatic experiences.
- Ensure that parents and children have access to information about explosive remnants of war, and that even young children know how to safeguard themselves from these dangers as they move to unfamiliar environments.
- Support efforts to increase children's access to school or non-formal education and other basic services.
- Prevent and monitor patterns of violence against girls and boys. Risks emerging from the crisis and from families' survival strategies must be mitigated wherever possible across the response.
- Strengthen community protection structures such as families, extended families and village committees. Strengthen the child protection functions of law enforcement bodies for example by establishing child friendly reporting desks at police stations.

