



# Executive Summary

## Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia 2015- 2018

Independent assessment of the collective humanitarian response of the IASC member organizations

November 2019

# Executive Summary

## About the 2019 Ethiopia Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

**Scope.** This report presents the results of an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the drought response in Ethiopia between 2015 and 2018; primarily the El Niño drought starting in 2015, and the Indian Ocean Dipole drought in 2017. It is an independent assessment of the collective humanitarian response of Inter-Agency Standing Committee member organizations. It focuses on contributions of the international system and does not aim to evaluate the response of the Government of Ethiopia.

**Evaluation questions (EQ).** The evaluation sought to answer the following main questions: (1) Relevance: Do the planning documents reflect the needs and priorities of people affected by the droughts? (2) Effectiveness: Did the response reach its intended results? (3) Sustainability: Did the response help build resilience? (4) Partnerships & Localization: Did the response adequately build partnerships and involve local capacities? (5) Coordination: Was the response well coordinated?

**Use.** The evaluation provides country-level as well as global and systemic recommendations. At the country level, the Humanitarian Coordinator leads the development of a formal management response plan, which is monitored on an annual basis. At the global level, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals seek to ensure that global and systemic recommendations are addressed and that follow-up is monitored.

**Methods.** The evaluation used mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods to triangulate results derived from different sources, including aid workers, government officials, donors, and affected people: Key stakeholder interviews, a survey and focus group discussions with affected people, quantitative analysis, document analysis, and an aid worker and donor survey. The evaluation was conducted between December 2018 and October 2019. The evaluation team considered gender issues throughout the evaluation process, and sought to implement the evaluation in a conflict-sensitive way.

## Evaluation Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations

### The Response Was Well Coordinated, But Some Space for Improvement Remains

**Strategic coordination.** The introduction of the cluster system in 2015 strengthened international response coordination. However, attempts to turn the Humanitarian Country Team into a strategic decision-making body have had limited success, as the forum is large and donor presence hinders open discussions. The coordination structure in Addis Ababa is perceived as too onerous, in part because of overlaps and duplications between different fora. Coordination at regional level was perceived as more efficient, but lacked sufficient decision-making power (except for the Somali region). EQ  
5.1

**Cluster coordination.** Investments in dedicated cluster coordinators and information management capacities have improved coordination. Within clusters, there are examples of gaps and duplications that were successfully avoided. Performance varied between clusters, depending in large part on each coordinator's capacity and length of deployment, as well as the level of trust and participation of NGOs. EQ  
5.1

**Inter-cluster coordination.** Inter-cluster coordination was effective for specific and geographically contained emergencies. For the overall drought response, gaps between the food, nutrition, health, and water responses persisted, and uncoordinated minimum standards and cash-for-work rates had a negative impact on agencies' capacity to operate effectively. Efforts to address these gaps were not successful due to misaligned funding priorities among donors, competition between humanitarian organizations, and a lack of follow-up to global missions. EQs  
5.1  
5.2

**Involvement of national NGOs.** In a restrictive regulatory environment, few national NGOs were active in the drought response in Ethiopia and mostly acted as subcontractors for international organizations. Some efforts to strengthen capacities in the wake of the Grand Bargain had lasting effects on a limited number of national NGOs. However, most capacity-building efforts were short-lived. Only three national NGOs accessed funding from the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund (EHF). While generally recognized as very useful, interviewees also criticized the short-term focus of the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund and its tendency to support sector-focused responses. EQs  
4.2  
4.3

### Recommendation: Further Enhance Coordination and the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund



To fill the few remaining gaps in coordination, the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team should regularly dedicate meetings to a more self-critical analysis of collective response gaps (with representatives of regional coordination, but without donors present) and agree upon and monitor action points. An inter-cluster review process should help ensure that multi-sector projects are included in the Humanitarian Response Plan. The Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund should aim to allocate 50 percent of its funding and other donors should significantly increase their share of funding for multi-sector projects. The Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund should also lower the bar for national NGOs to access funding and extend the typical duration of projects it supports to one year.

## Early Warning Information Did Not Lead to Enough Early Action. Collective Resource Mobilization Was More Successful in 2015/16 than in 17/18

**Timeliness of the response.** 41 percent of affected people surveyed had to wait for more than five months after the beginning of the drought until they received assistance. The response was timely enough to prevent many drought-related deaths, but not sufficiently timely to prevent sharp increases in severe acute malnutrition (especially in Afar and the Somali region) and in school dropout rates. They also did not manage to prevent many illnesses and a sharp erosion of assets.

EQ  
5.3

**Early warning and early action.** Early warning systems for humanitarians were sufficient to predict the severity of the different droughts, though reports were not suitable for warning affected people. Humanitarian organizations and donors reacted late to available warnings. This was due to lengthy assessment and government approval processes; late government recognition of the emergency; absence of emergency departments in critical line ministries; intervening political dynamics; slow funding decisions and processes; and competing humanitarian priorities.

EQ  
5.3

**Resource mobilization.** A strong, collective resource mobilization effort for the El Niño drought in 2015 resulted in funding arriving late but at a high level in 2016. Resource mobilization efforts for the Indian Ocean Dipole in 2017 were less successful, mainly due to underestimated needs and competing, conflict-related priorities. Among funding instruments, aid workers recognized internal emergency funds of humanitarian organizations, crisis modifiers<sup>[1]</sup> of development programs, and the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund as enabling a timely response and filling gaps. Various bilateral funding instruments were criticized as unpredictable, heavily earmarked, and not always aligned with the priorities set by the humanitarian community.

EQ  
5.3

### Recommendation: Strengthen Early Action



To strengthen anticipatory and early action, the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team should dedicate a meeting with the participation of representatives of regional coordination fora to analyzing drought (early) warning information when such information is published. In that meeting, the team should define immediate priorities for early action, assign clear responsibilities for follow-up, and recommend what share of resources of the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund should be allocated to anticipatory action. Capacity-building organizations should prioritize the establishment or strengthening of emergency units within relevant line ministries and regional emergency operations centres of the Ethiopian government. Donors should speed up their shift to anticipatory, unearmarked, multi-year funding for drought responses, and UN organizations urgently need to pass on existing flexibility to their implementing partners. Donors and development organizations should make crisis modifiers a standard in development programs in areas prone to drought, and ensure that related decision-making processes allow for flexibility to focus on areas most acutely affected by the crisis.

Rec 3

[1] The terms “crisis modifiers” is used here to refer to a mechanism that enables the quick allocation of development funds for humanitarian activities in the event of a crisis. In some models, a crisis modifier re-allocates a share of existing funding of a development project to humanitarian activities. In others, additional “top-up” funds or dedicated contingency funds are used. See Katie Peters and Florence Pichon. 2017. *Crisis Modifiers. A Solution for a More Flexible Development-Humanitarian System?* ODI.

## A Majority of People Got What They Needed Most, but There Were Important Gaps in Needs Assessment, Planning, and Accountability to Affected People

**Relevance.** A clear majority of 64 percent of affected people surveyed for this evaluation felt that the response was relevant and included what they needed most. However, over one third stated that the response did not provide what they needed most, including a majority of respondents in Tigray. EQ  
1.2

**Needs assessments.** The credibility of collective needs assessments in Ethiopia is highly contested. The quality of needs assessments processes was poor, results were politically influenced, and planning documents did not always reflect assessment results. The recently introduced International Phase Classification system and the household economy approach have the potential to improve data quality. EQ  
1.1

**Accountability to affected people.** While a strong majority of affected people (74 percent) felt treated with respect, formal mechanisms for creating accountability to affected people were often weak. Between one third and half of the people consulted did not know what assistance they would receive or when, what the selection criteria were, or how they could complain. Statistically, whether or not affected people were consulted on their needs and priorities had a strong effect on how useful they found the assistance in the longer-term. Inter-agency processes aiming to strengthen accountability to affected people have not produced tangible outcomes so far. EQ  
1.2

**Planning and prioritization.** While the official prioritization of geographic areas largely matched observed drought patterns, the prioritization had only a limited influence on the allocation of assistance. Additional, collective prioritization exercises and assessments conducted by individual organizations were useful for targeting interventions. A recurrent controversy was whether humanitarian assistance should only target those facing recent shocks, or whether assistance should extend to those who have not yet recovered. EQs  
2.3  
1.2

**Sector priorities.** The drought response focused heavily on food. While affected people confirmed food as something they needed urgently in the short-term, this only partially covered what affected people would have prioritized. Livelihood assistance was a major gap, with agriculture underfunded throughout. Other critical sectors (nutrition, WASH, health) were also massively underfunded in some years. see  
Rec 2  
below

## The Drought Response Managed to Save Lives, but Was Less Successful in Restoring Livelihoods and Did Not Increase Resilience

**Monitoring data.** The humanitarian community in Ethiopia is unable to track the collective effectiveness of its drought response due to a lack of outcome monitoring and sufficiently disaggregated information and analysis on outputs. EQ  
2

**Saving lives.** Despite issues with data availability, this evaluation found evidence that lives were saved. 58 percent of the affected people surveyed suspected that (more) family members would have died without assistance, treatment of severe acute malnutrition met international standards, and there are reports that food assistance had a positive effect on food consumption scores. EQ  
2.1

**Delays, quality issues, and gaps.** The humanitarian community could have saved more lives with timelier and better quality assistance. The arrival and distribution of food and supplementary feeding at the district level was at times heavily delayed, and drought-affected people pointed to quality issues with food assistance. Insufficient quantities of assistance were delivered, and there were gaps in the services provided. EQ  
2.1

**Impartiality.** The geographic prioritization of the response largely matched the level of need. Affected people surveyed were clearly more satisfied with the response in Afar and the Somali region than in Oromia. By contrast, interviewed aid workers perceived regional imbalances as particularly affecting Afar. Within geographic areas, the majority of affected people perceived the assistance provided as fair, as not leaving anybody out, and as reaching those who needed it most. However, weak targeting systems meant that humanitarian assistance did not always target the poorest segments of society. Planning processes also did not give much consideration to different vulnerable groups, and interviewees provided several examples of situations in which the response was not adapted to specific needs. On the whole, women rated the response more positively than men. In contrast, people with disabilities and elderly people perceived the response more negatively. EQs  
2.3  
2.4

**Livelihoods and resilience.** The drought response was only partially successful in restoring affected people's livelihoods and was often not able to prevent affected people from becoming less resilient to droughts and other crises over time. This is due to the rapid succession of several droughts; a response that did not sufficiently focus on livelihood interventions, especially in agriculture and WASH; a lack of funding for livelihoods and resilience interventions; and a lack of consultation of affected people.

EQs  
2.2  
3.2

**Links with development interventions.** The use of crisis modifiers helped to link humanitarian and development interventions. Some clusters also managed to attract funding from development budgets for emergency interventions. However, effective links to development interventions were missing in many areas. This remains a major concern, despite repeated discussions, policy initiatives, and advocacy efforts to address this issue. Thus, development and humanitarian interventions were not coherent in several of the examples analyzed for this evaluation. The ability to create links between programs was also limited by the fact that important development programs did not focus on areas most affected by droughts.

EQ  
3.3

**Unintended effects.** 94 percent of the affected people surveyed did not see any unintended, negative effects of the drought response. However, aid workers and communities recognized that growing dependency on aid was a major issue. Individual examples of other unintended, negative effects on women, the private sector, and the environment were mentioned.

EQ  
2.5

#### **Recommendation: Prioritize Resilience and Support Alternative Livelihoods**

Rec 4



Efforts from both, humanitarian and development actors, are needed to strengthen resilience and livelihoods. Development actors, in cooperation with the Government of Ethiopia, should increase their investment in resilience and livelihoods; ensure that relevant development programs focus on geographic areas prone to drought; and align development planning instruments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework with the forthcoming resilience strategy. The humanitarian community should ensure that the 2020–2025 multi-year strategy for resilience and durable solutions includes concrete, joint humanitarian and development programs focused on reducing drought risk – and does not stop at defining overarching goals or delineating responsibilities. Agencies should support drought-affected pastoralists in particular in developing alternative livelihoods and strengthening systems for those who remain pastoralists. The emergency capacity and footprint of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and of other agriculture cluster members in Ethiopia should be strengthened to make better use of their expertise on livelihoods and the resilience of agricultural and pastoralist communities. At the same time, the humanitarian system should replace food distributions with cash wherever possible to reduce dependency and enable market growth.

## **The Close Partnership with the Government of Ethiopia Enabled a Successful Response**

**Operational partnership.** Global humanitarian action is often criticized for creating parallel structures and undermining existing systems. The international response in Ethiopia avoided this common pitfall because the Government of Ethiopia actively assumed and defended its leadership role. The close integration of the international humanitarian and government response was widely seen as key to explaining successes of the drought response since 2015. There was also some evidence that the close cooperation strengthened government response capacities in some areas, for example in logistics, health, and nutrition. Critical gaps at the point of delivery remain, especially with regard to targeting and food distribution due to the high turnover of trained staff and a limited focus on advocacy and capacity building at the sub-national level.

EQs  
3.1  
4.2  
4.3

## **The Current Lack of Accountability is Unacceptable**

**Accountability.** The strong reliance on Ethiopia's national systems came at a high price. National data and accountability systems (while not the focus of this evaluation) had obvious and broadly acknowledged limitations. Despite this fact, the humanitarian community in Ethiopia failed to develop a strong, independent monitoring system. As a result, government and international actors often did not know who was receiving assistance, let alone what effects the assistance was having. Local communities were also not in a position to hold those who delivered assistance to account as they had little information about the planned response. The evaluation concludes that this lack of accountability is unacceptable considering the scale of the international response.

EQ  
4.1

### Recommendation: Make the Response More Accountable



As long as credible, government-led accountability mechanisms are not in place, the humanitarian community in Ethiopia needs to put in place strong measures to make the response more accountable. This involves continuing to strengthen needs assessments by systematically including consultations with drought-affected people (independently of local officials); fully implementing and regularizing the International Phase Classification and the Humanitarian Needs Overview systems; regularly conducting disaggregated analyses of available data by geographic area and by potentially vulnerable group; and more actively triangulating overall results by participants in joint needs assessments. The humanitarian community should strengthen accountability to affected people and response monitoring by providing affected communities and their leaders with accurate and up-to-date information on what and how much assistance is expected to be delivered when; which selection criteria will be used; and where to complain if necessary. OCHA and NDRMC should commission an annual survey of affected people and offer a phone-based, inter-agency complaints mechanisms.

## The Drought Response Was Successful in Many Respects, but the Humanitarian System Failed to Learn Some Critical Lessons

Evaluation findings relating to the key evaluation questions (summarized above) show that the Ethiopian drought response was successful in many respects. However, it is striking that most of the critical issues this evaluation identifies have been raised before. Of 14 key issues, 11 had come up during a mission of the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team in 2016, and 10 were discussed by an inter-agency real-time evaluation conducted in 2012 (see Figure 47). The majority of affected people surveyed also saw little evidence of learning. 78 percent felt that the current or most recent response was not better than the response before that. Reasons for not learning lessons include factors relating to the difficult operating context in Ethiopia, problems of the funding architecture, and the focus of many reform efforts on policy, rather than implementation.

EQ  
1.3

Some lessons were learned. The quality of assessments improved, protection coordination was strengthened, and disconnects between humanitarian food assistance and the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) started to be addressed. Nevertheless, the evaluation concludes that it is crucial that the humanitarian community focus on implementing reforms and addressing barriers to learning.

### Recommendation: Ensure Lessons Are Learned and Reforms Implemented



To address the structural factors which prevent lessons from being learned and reform efforts from being implemented, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia, together with the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team and the Emergency Directors Group, should inform affected communities about planned changes and regularly report on progress made in addressing the recommendations of this evaluation. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee should dedicate its full attention to understanding and addressing the reasons why past reform efforts have failed and shift resources and attention away from developing policies and towards analyzing and addressing obstacles to change.

Rec 1

# Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group



an IASC associated body

## Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia

Final Version, November 2019

### Evaluation Team

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) was conducted by Dr. Julia Steets (GPPi, Team Leader), Ms. Claudia Meier (GPPi, Deputy Team Leader), Ms. Doe-e Berhanu, Dr. Solomon Tsehay, Ms. Amleset Haile Abreha.

### Evaluation Management

Management Group members for this project included: Mr. Hicham Daoudi (UNFPA) and Ms. Maame Duah (FAO).

The evaluation was managed by Ms. Djoeke van Beest and Ms. Tijana Bojanic, supported by Mr. Assefa Bahta, in OCHA's Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Guidance Section.

**Acknowledgments:** The evaluation team wishes to express its heartfelt thanks to everyone who took the time to participate in interviews, respond to surveys, provide access to documents and data sets, and comment on draft reports. We are particularly grateful to those who helped facilitate evaluation missions and guided the evaluation process: the enumerators who travelled long distances to survey affected people, the OCHA Ethiopia team, the Evaluation Management Group and the Evaluation Managers, the in-country Advisory Group, and the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group.

Cover Photo: Women weather the microburst in Ber'aano Woreda in Somali region of Ethiopia. Credit: UNICEF

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group is an IASC associated body      Feedback: [ochaspegs@un.org](mailto:ochaspegs@un.org)

Find the full report on: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations>

on: <https://www.unocha.org/themes/evaluations-and-reviews/reports>

and on: [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)