**For Immediate Release**

**East Africa**: **Older People at Risk of Malnutrition, Starvation**

*Humanitarian Response Should Reach People Most at Risk*

**(**September 2, 2022,Washington, DC**)** Millions of older people are at risk of starvation in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan, HelpAge USA said today. Humanitarian agencies should urgently ensure life-saving aid reaches them.

“The catastrophic drought in East Africa threatens the lives of millions of older people, who are frequently among the hardest hit in natural disasters,” said Cindy Cox-Roman, CEO of HelpAge USA. “Humanitarian agencies too often fail to reach those most on the margins of society. If this repeats in the East Africa region, there may be devastating loss of life among older people and their families.”

A new [report](https://helpageusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Needs-Assessment-of-Older-People-East-Africa-Drought-21-June-22.pdf) from HelpAge and the Humanitarian Development Consortium found that older people in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan face desperate hunger, lack of water, loss of livestock, and obstacles to care for their grandchildren. The organizations interviewed 1,192 older people in the three countries in April and May. The majority of interviewees are pastoralists who rely upon livestock for sustenance and livelihoods.

The East Africa region is experiencing its worst drought in over 40 years following four consecutive failed rainy seasons in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, [according to the UN](https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-regional-humanitarian-overview-call-action-business-brief-july-2022), decimating crops and livestock herds. Over 18 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have insufficient food.

Of the older people interviewed by HelpAge, 73% said they do not have enough food. In Ethiopia, 92% reported going hungry. The majority said they only eat one meal a day, but many reported eating even fewer meals.

While humanitarian aid is reaching some, over half reported that the rations they receive as humanitarian aid are not sufficient. Others described chaotic relief distribution. For example, a 71-year-old man from Maikona, in northern Kenya, said: “Although there are people who generally sympathize with old people like me, during food relief distributions, people scramble for it and that becomes a challenge for us as elderly people.”

Difficulty accessing food is compounded by [high food prices](https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/implications-ukraine-conflict-food-access-and-availability-east-africa-region-update-3-june-2022) and a sharp drop in imports due to the war in Ukraine. For example, [90% of wheat consumed in Kenya](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/star-farmer/2022-02-28-wheat-flour-prices-could-go-up-due-to-russia-ukraine-war/) comes from Ukraine and Russia.

Half of the older people interviewed by HelpAge also reported they do not have access to safe drinking water.  Many pre-existing water sources have dried up and available water points can be far away and hard to reach, particularly for those who have difficulty walking.

One interviewee from Ethiopia said 14 out of the 17 ponds where he lives have dried up. He explained: “There is no source of clean water in our village. I hear there is a [well] about two hours away from our village. I can’t get there. My wife goes to fetch water for us. It is not clean. Since we have no option, we drink it.”

During past droughts, pastoralists said they could typically migrate to find better pasture and water. If necessary, they could use their animals for food or sell them. One pastoralist described their previous life: “We drink the milk and eat the meat and also sell the meat to earn money.”

Now, according to the UN, at least 7 million livestock have died across the region since October 2020. In Borena, southern Ethiopia, 10,000 families have lost their entire herds, including Malicha Guyo Liban, 66, who had 130 cows. He described the drought and the loss:

All the pasturelands are bare. Ponds have dried up. Our cows have nothing to eat. I tried to keep them alive by buying hay with some money I saved up. But it was beyond my capacity. Eventually, I took all my cows to a nearby district … about 50 miles from my village. I found the same situation there, so I immediately returned, and the cows started dying on the road home. I also lost goats.

In many cases adult children have left villages to seek economic opportunities in other locations. Older people take on significant caregiving responsibilities, at a time that they may struggle to feed themselves: 88% reported they care for at least one of their grandchildren, with the average older person caring for more than five.

The humanitarian situation is complicated by [conflict and political turmoil](https://www.brookings.edu/events/challenges-facing-the-horn-of-africa/). Many of the people interviewed have been affected by inter-communal or cross-border conflicts, including conflict over scarce resources.

The UNestimates that humanitarian funding of US$4.4 billion is required to provide life-saving assistance and protection in the region. Due to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme was [forced to suspend assistance](https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-forced-suspend-food-assistance-south-sudan-funds-dry-and-nation-faces-hungriest-year) planned for 1.7 million people.

HelpAge has initiated an emergency response in Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan to support thousands of older people by providing cash, food supplies, clean water, crop seeds, and goats. The organization is also drilling and rehabilitating wells. It supports malnutrition screening for 1,600 older people in South Sudan.

“This is a crisis that the world needs to listen to; more support is urgently needed,” said Carole Ogeng'o, Africa Director for HelpAge. “People are starving to death right now,”

HelpAge is calling on UN, national governments, and development agencies to urgently scale up funding to support older people in East Africa with food aid, clean water, cash, mobile health care, psychosocial support, and rehabilitation of existing water sources. They should also support pastoralist communities who have lost their livestock so they can restock.

[HelpAge USA](https://helpageusa.org/) is part of the HelpAge Global Network which works across **86 countries** to advance the well-being and inclusion of older people in the world’s poorest communities. The [Humanitarian Development Consortium](https://socialprotection.org/connect/stakeholders/humanitarian-and-development-consortium-hdc) is a non-profit humanitarian organization in South Sudan.

For more information on HelpAge USA visit: https://helpageusa.org/

**Contacts**

In Washington, DC, contact for HelpAge USA:

Cindy Cox-Roman, CEO, [ccoxroman@helpageusa.org](mailto:ccoxroman@helpageusa.org)

Tel: +1 202-709-8442