



# A GENDERED IMPACT OF THE HUNGER AND DROUGHT CRISIS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA



*When the chips are down, it is always the girls who bear the brunt of the drought situation,”*

*Sadia Allin, Country Director, Plan International  
Somalia*

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

Plan international has declared a Red Alert, which is the highest level of humanitarian response requiring prioritisation of actions to end the crisis. Through the Red Alert, Plan International aims to scale up the hunger response in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan. Interventions include expanding response efforts such as food distribution, cash and voucher assistance, school meals, WASH services, malnutrition screening and nutrition supplementation. In addition, Plan International is providing livelihood protection and support activities.

We believe in the power and potential of every child. However, this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. More often, it is girls who are most affected. Working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood as well as enable children to prepare for – and respond to – crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

With the increasing numbers of drought affected people in the region coupled with inflation and impacts of Ukraine war, there is a need to have a structured approach on how to respond to drought related humanitarian concerns. The impact of the drought in the Horn of Africa has led to loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, malnutrition, water scarcity, epidemics, conflicts, children dropping out of school especially girls, and protection risks such as early and forced marriage and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

This policy brief combines findings from Plan's rapid gender analyses conducted in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia and Kenya and existing literature, to present the gendered impacts of the hunger and drought crises in the Horn of Africa.



*A health worker takes Lelo's arm measurements to check malnutrition in Ethiopia.*

## HORN OF AFRICA COUNTRY CONTEXT ANALYSIS

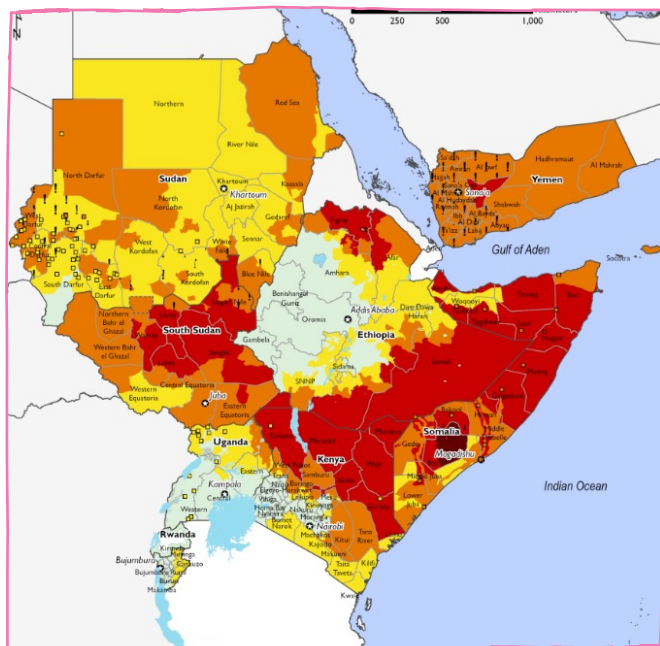
The current drought and hunger situation in the Horn of Africa is considered the worst in the last 40 years. Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia and Kenya are in different stages of IPC facing unprecedented levels of drought and hunger. The maps below show that high

levels of acute food insecurity persist in some parts of East Africa, with Famine (IPC Phase 5) projected in parts of Somalia. The maps give a projection of August to September diagram 1 and October to December 2022 diagram 2.<sup>1</sup>

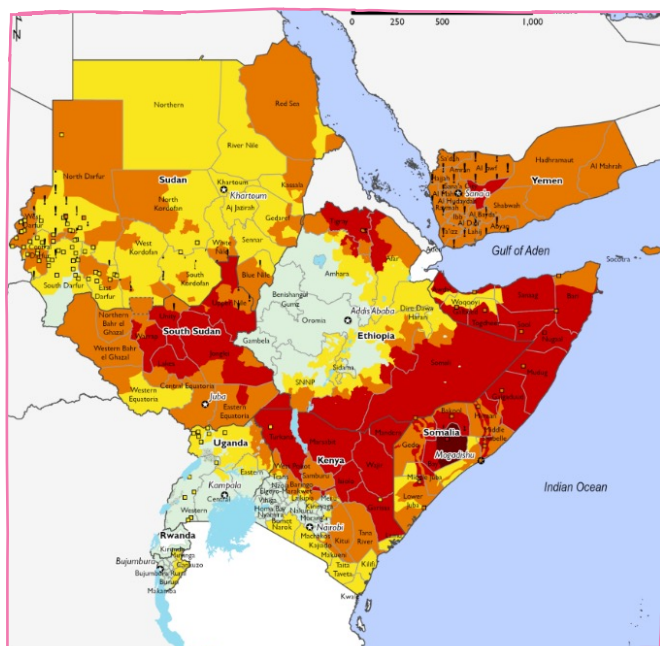
<sup>1</sup> East Africa - Key Message Update: Fri, 2022-09-16 | Famine Early Warning Systems Network (fews.net)



**FIGURE 1: AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 2022 ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY HOA.**



**FIGURE 2: OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2022 ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY HOA.**



## ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is in IPC 3 and in some parts IPC 4 this situation is likely to persist until early 2023. Due to the drought there is prolonged conflict in parts of the country which has continued to drive elevated levels of acute malnutrition and hunger related mortalities. Despite ongoing response mitigating food consumption deficits, an urgent scale up of aid is needed to save lives and livelihoods<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Ethiopia | Famine Early Warning Systems Network (fews.net)

There are 8.1 million people across the country affected by the drought. Of these, more than 7.2 million people are classified as highly food insecure, while 4.4 million need clean water<sup>3</sup>. More than 185,000 children are severely malnourished, and 206,000 pregnant and lactating women acutely malnourished<sup>4</sup>. As a result of hunger, more than 286,000 people have left their homes in search of assistance. Over 2,000 schools are closed, affecting more than 682,000 students<sup>5</sup>.

## SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is in IPC 4, which is driven by prolonged conflict and adverse weather conditions such as floods. A fourth consecutive year of flooding is expected to result in another year of livestock and crop losses. Probability for a worse scenario where the country will slip into IPC 5 is projected. Levels of acute food insecurity are expected to further deteriorate in most areas between October 2022 and January 2023, during which time widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are likely<sup>6</sup>.

Over 8.9 million people require humanitarian assistance and increase from 7 million people in 2018. It is estimated that almost 3 million people are likely to face emergency acute-food insecurity, necessitating an immediate scaling-up of humanitarian assistance to save lives. A total of 2.8 million children are already out of school and 52% of girls are married before the age of 18<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, an estimated 46% of children aged 10-14 are engaged in child labour<sup>8</sup>.

## SOMALIA

Somalia is in IPC 4 with pockets in IPC 5, in addition to the Famine (IPC Phase 5) projection in two districts of Bay Region. Several areas in central and southern Somalia have an increased Risk of Famine through December 2022. Humanitarian response has prevented the worsening of food security and nutrition outcomes. Somalia remain at high risk, and the situation will further deteriorate if food assistance is not scaled up and sustained. Persistent drought is expected to worsen the level of humanitarian needs during the January to March 2023 dry Jilaal season across most of Somalia<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Ethiopia: Situation Report," 19 September 2022, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ethiopia\\_drought\\_update\\_3\\_june\\_2022.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ethiopia_drought_update_3_june_2022.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> KII from DRCM Ethiopia RGA Report

<sup>6</sup> South Sudan | Famine Early Warning Systems Network (fews.net)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF Report

<sup>8</sup> Borgen Project report

<sup>9</sup> Somalia | Famine Early Warning Systems Network (fews.net)



Currently, 7.1 million people, nearly 50 percent of the population are facing crisis-level food insecurity or worse. Of those, 213,000 people are classified as being at Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) level 5, meaning

they face catastrophic hunger and starvation<sup>10</sup>. As of October 2021, drought has forced more than 805,000 people to leave their homes in search of food, and water or both<sup>11</sup>.

## KENYA



*Due to the scarcity of water, I only take a bath once in a week. This is unhygienic and can cause some health problems. This year is the toughest ever for all girls in Ganze sub county. A lack of water and food is pushing some girls to indulge in sexual activities to survive the hunger and to buy sanitary pads,”*

*says 15-year-old from Kenya.*

<sup>10</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-drought-response-and-famine-prevention-situation-report-no-8-30-june-2022>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/news/rains-fail-again-catastrophic-hunger-looms-over-somalia#:~:text=Mogadishu%20%E2%80%93%20A%20historic%20fourth%20consecutive,starvation%20and%20disease%20in%20Somalia>



Kenya is in IPC 3 with pockets of some counties in IPC 4. Across Kenya, acute food insecurity remains elevated due to the impacts of drought conditions experienced in four consecutive rainy seasons. These conditions have affected crop and livestock production and triggered high inflation. As a result, access to food is constrained among poor households given stagnant wages in urban areas, and shrinking income-earning opportunities in rural areas. The food security situation will worsen up to 2023<sup>12</sup>.

The people in Emergency (IPC 4) remains 1.1 million, while an estimated 3,002,000 are in a crisis situation, a total of 5,088,000 stressed, and 5,962,000 people food secure (IPC1). More than 942,500 children aged 6-59 months and 134,000 pregnant or lactating women need treatment for acute malnutrition. The latest forecast by The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC)

## IMPACT OF DROUGHT ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

Pre-existing unequal gender norms are more often compounded during crises including hunger due to drought. The assessment indicates that more girls than boys are dropping out of school due to the increased burden of work and child marriages. In Kenya, reported cases of girls forced to drop out of due to a lack of food, transactional sex for food or money to buy the commodity, and teenage pregnancies are on the increase.



*I have a class with not one single girl. These girls are either married or at home. The girls are the ones who do all the household chores, so it becomes difficult for these girls to do all this work then come to class, so they opt to drop out of school so that they can keep up with their chores"*

*Teacher in Tana River County, Kenya.*

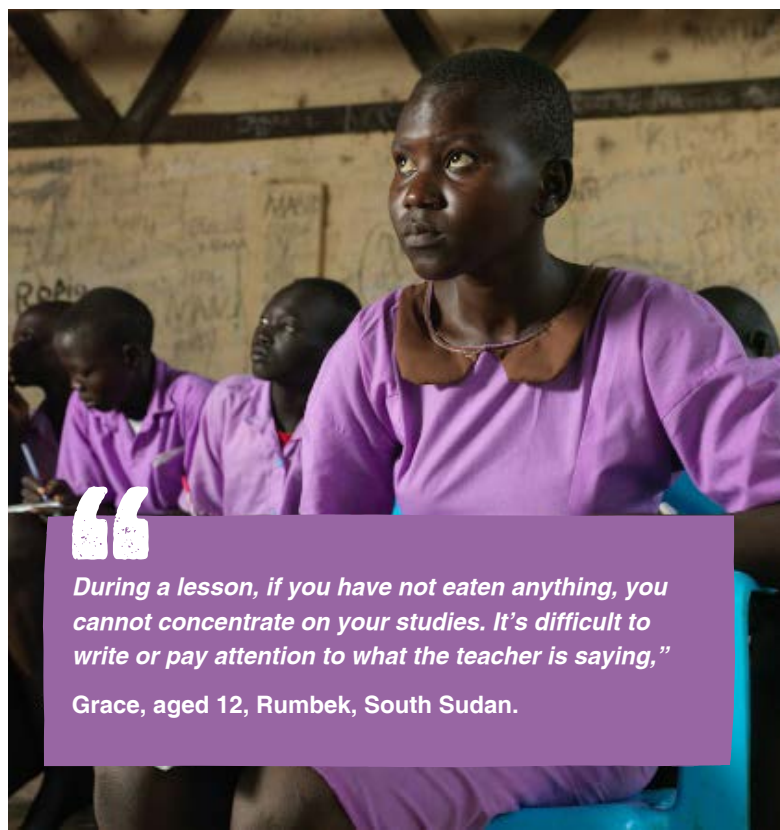
12 Kenya | Famine Early Warning Systems Network (fewes.net)

is for a fifth consecutive failed rain season across the region. A significant number of adolescent girl's risk dropping out of school while risks of , GBV, child neglect, exploitation, child labour and abuse are likely to increase.

### Impact of the crisis on children, girls and women

The Rapid Gender Analyses (RGAs) were conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan to identify and understand the impacts of the drought and hunger on girls, women, boys and men. Experiences of girls and women were prioritized to identify their unique needs, as well as capacities to inform the humanitarian response. Through the assessment, it was largely noted that the drought situation with existing gendered sociocultural norms have put women and girls in a more vulnerable position as demonstrated in the sessions below.

In Somalia, 12 percent of adult respondents confirmed that they were prioritizing boys over girls to continue with their education while girls are relegated to domestic chores. In Rumbek, South Sudan a senior woman teacher attributed girls' failure to attend school to the absence of a girls-friendly environment.



*During a lesson, if you have not eaten anything, you cannot concentrate on your studies. It's difficult to write or pay attention to what the teacher is saying,"*

*Grace, aged 12, Rumbek, South Sudan.*

## IMPACT OF DROUGHT ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Scarcity in resources during emergencies creates tensions, and heightens the risks of sexual and gender-based violence mostly for girls and women.<sup>13</sup> The underlying causes of violence are associated with attitudes, beliefs, norms and structures that promote and/or condone gender-based discrimination and unequal power dynamics<sup>14</sup> In the face of drought and loss of livelihoods, those entrusted to protect girls and young women can be the ones that endanger their lives and wellbeing. Out of desperation, parents and guardians may force girls into harmful practices including child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, sex work, exploitation and child labour. All these risks were identified in all the target countries. Findings show the close linkages between children, early and forced marriages with poverty, food insecurity and economic situation of girls' families. The results from Sool, Sanaag and Togdheer regions in Somaliland indicate that 48% of SGBV survivors could not access SGBV services. For those that reported services as being available (52%), they identified access to medical care (73%), legal services (52%), trauma counselling (33%), referrals (23%) and case management (26%) as the most prevalent available services. In Rumbek, South Sudan access to education among school going children aged 13-17 years show, 52% of the women knew of a girl who had not attended school and 9% of the boys. About 79% of the men knew of a girl who did not attend school in this age category and only 4% among the boys.

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*Particularly homeless adolescent girls from 14 to 17 years old, and living on the streets are highly vulnerable to SGBV, abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Closing of schools also contributes to an increase in SGBV in this area'*

Key Informant from Ethiopia

## IMPACT OF DROUGHT ON GIRLS' SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Due to severe hunger, sustained provision of quality sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

education, and services in public institutions has been deprioritized in many of the areas affected by hunger across Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

Due to reduced purchasing power at household level, food is given priority as compared to contraceptives, menstrual hygiene products, and under garments, which affects the wellbeing and hygiene women and girls. Women from Gumbi Boredede, Ethiopia stated that the distance to health centers and health posts limits access to maternal and reproductive health services. Access to health care seems high with 82% respondents indicating accessible health services were available. For those unable to access health services, financial constraint (81%) and lack of female staff (17%) were the main reasons given in Somaliland. The assessment result revealed that the adolescent girls and young women cannot afford sanitary and hygiene packs in Kilifi, Kenya.

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*As a mother you just find that the mattress if 'eaten' from inside under and you wonder what happened to it, upon interrogating the girls the confess to use it for their monthly periods.'*

Said a mother the VSLA group.



**Motie Mulu, 16, walks for more than an hour to reach a water source in Ethiopia.**

13 Mainstreaming GBV in Humanitarian Action in Somalia. IASC GBV Working Group report

14 IASC (Inter-agency Standing Committee), 2015a. Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery.



# OUR RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS



*Plan International staff, Mary during a food distribution exercise in South Sudan.*

Plan International's response to the drought situation is aimed at saving lives, reduce food insecurity and increase access to services in the communities most affected across the four targeted countries. Plan has delivered immediate, life-saving assistance to those in the most urgent need of food, in line with outlined priorities for response at the country level. Plan International has been addressing specific negative coping strategies affecting girls during the food insecurity crisis, and other protection risks to advance gender equality and children's rights and reinforce equality for girls. To protect communities means of livelihood, build their resilience through strengthening of early recovery actions, our response to the crisis has been focusing on;

## LIVELIHOODS, FOOD, NUTRITION & HEALTH

Plan International has enhanced access to food and nutrition commodities as well as building the resilience of vulnerable communities through provision of multi-purpose cash transfer assistance. The support has prioritised most vulnerable households and the Internally Displaced Persons (IPDs). Ongoing collaboration with the government nutrition teams has provided will be enhanced to provide integrated management of acute malnutrition outreach programmes. Food vouchers have been distributed to promote consumption of nutritious food items at household level to bolster protection of children in outpatient therapeutic programme and supplementary feeding programmes.

## SAFEGUARDING AND PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

Plan International has focused on awareness-raising to address the heightened risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, using the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming. Staff and volunteers have been trained on Gender, GBV prevention and Safeguarding/PSEA at the country and field levels for mainstreaming in all project activities and to mitigate safeguarding and PSEA associated risks.

## EDUCATION

Plan International has trained teachers and directors in participatory pedagogy, classroom management, and psychosocial support. Capacity building for Community Education Committees (CECs). Awareness raising campaigns and capacity building initiatives are being conducted in the most affected communities to end harmful practices and enhance child protection.

## SCHOOL WASH

Plan International has distributed hygiene and dignity kits to vulnerable households, IDPs, and affected host communities is ongoing. Construction and rehabilitation of WASH facilities in IDP settings at schools, health and community centres is also underway.



*I was a grade 11 student at high school, but I had to quit school because of the terrible drought. My family used to own 50 cows but all our cattle perished as a result of the drought. My mother used to buy me notebooks, pencils, and other school supplies by selling milk and other dairy produce. Without our cattle, it is much more challenging for us to find food,”*

*explains Motie Mulu from Ethiopia.*



Plan International has strengthened community-based child protection mechanisms, through child protection committees. Provision of case management and referrals for children at risk or survivors of abuse, exploitation and children living with disabilities. This includes through referrals for other services and financial support or vouchers. Plan International has enhanced the capacity of children and youth to engage in Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) interventions through the identification and analysis of risks and hazards in their communities and developing and implementing disaster mitigation plans.



*Most girls have to stay at home because they're asked by their mothers to stay. But boys don't and even if they're asked they say no, but girls don't have the assertiveness to say no to staying at home and say no! I want to go to school!'*

**Sarah, aged 13, South Sudan.**

**Mulki and her friend during the community advocacy action in Somalia.**

## SPECIFIC CONCERNS FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

- Neglecting the SRHR needs of children, adolescents and young women has serious consequences – including unintended early pregnancy and its associated risks, CEFMU, sexually transmitted diseases and psychological trauma. In 2022, 192 ECM cases were reported from 17 woredas in Ethiopia and some young girls consider marriage as a means of coping mechanism from hunger and drought.
- Girls and women face a high risk of sexual violence while collecting water and fuel needed to prepare food and further risks may occur due to lack of safety and security mechanisms including during food distributions. Incidences of SGBV were reported to be on the rise by 34% particularly in Sool and Sanaag in Somaliland.

- When food is scarce, families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive. For adolescent girls, this often means that the risk of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and with it their risk of early pregnancy increases.
- Pregnant and lactating women, adolescents and under-fives are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition because of the increased rate at which they are growing and their bodies are changing. Lack of access to nutritious food during early childhood and adolescence can stunt children's growth and has significant impacts on brain development, which undermines school readiness, educational attainment, health, and economic outcomes. Adolescent girls also have increased needs for iron due to menstruation and are particularly at risk of malnutrition during pregnancy. Respondents from Somaliland indicated that most households (61%) did not receive any humanitarian assistance in the past 30 days with 64% of boys and 46% girls reporting that their household had not received any assistance in the past 30 days.
- Malnutrition poses particular threats to adolescent girls and women who are pregnant and lactating, increasing their risk of miscarriage and maternal mortality and the risks of stillbirth, newborn deaths, low birth weight and stunting for their children, leading to an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Women from Gumbi Boredede and Guba Koricha Woreda in Ethiopia, stated that food they are getting from the humanitarian aid is not adequate to properly feed their families as get 15 kilograms of grain per person for a household within three months interval.
- As families face mounting food insecurity, girls are increasingly called upon to care for younger siblings so parents can work or seek food, forcing them to miss or drop out of school. As a result, **girls' education is likely to be further deprioritised, exacerbating the gender gap in education**. Women from the Agiriama community in Kenya must seek consent from their husbands on whether to use contraceptives. The result of this is large families of close to 11 which piles pressure on the scarce food.

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*It is getting harder and harder. It's difficult for us, with no milk from our animals. Some have died, while others are so weak that they can't provide milk. The drought is just getting worse and worse”*

Said Sado, Somalia.

## CALL TO ACTION FOR GOVERNMENTS, DONORS AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Plan International appreciates that the importance of a collaborative approach towards response and meaningful engagement of stakeholders to identify long term solutions. Plan International proposes the following actions;
- Scale up unfettered access especially in conflict affected areas like Somalia in the Horn of Africa to save lives by prioritizing food security, nutrition, water, girls in crisis education, sexual reproductive health of girls and women.
- Advocate and support governments to reinforce and scale-up gender responsive, unconditional social protection and income support measures for the most affected families, including child- and female-headed households, families with young children, displaced populations.
- Create an enabling environment for humanitarian actors to complement the national response through a combination of nutrition, health, hygiene/sanitation, nurturing care for child development and gender equality information and messaging for families and communities.



- Provide adequate, timely and flexible funding to support as distribution of emergency cash transfers to ensure that girls and young women can protect themselves ahead of shocks.
- Coordination of multi sectoral and intersectional approaches to address the different needs and challenges of the affected population especially girls and women
- Ensure gender analysis is conducted to inform gender transformative response. (Sex- and age-disaggregated data, design implementation and evaluation).
- Participation and consultation of children in and adolescents in programming so as to understand their critical needs.
- Plan and design recovery and resilience initiatives to address the drought.

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***We last saw precious rain in the area in November 2020, as a result, all the water pans and water reservoirs have dried up. I have asked the government and other well-wishers to help us. We only asked for water, but even that has not been delivered,”***

**Yakub, a school teacher in Koticha primary school, Kenya.**

***2-year-old Juweeriya is a Student in one of the schools in Togdheer region in Somalia. She sometimes goes to school on an empty stomach.***

