

Migration and Climate Change in the Horn of Africa: Mainly in Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan

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Abstract

The influx of migrants within the Horn of Africa or crossing international boundaries in search of stability and asylum seeking is largely propelled by climate change. Climate change is responsible for migration of people, conflict and palpable lack of economic stability. As a result, 17 million people are threatened by a severe shortage of food in the Horn of Africa. The Horn is therefore one of the regions that is highly affected by climate change. Environmental crisis and eco-imbalance in the Horn of Africa is epitomized by perennial droughts, unpredictable rains, desertification, flash floods and land degradation. As such, climate change and human life are coterminous.

Introduction

In the Horn of Africa, (mainly Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Djibouti) migration and climate changeⁱ are not an oxymoron. In this vein, perennial drought has been ravaging broad sections of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and even Djibouti since 2018. According to the UN report, “a severe drought is affecting the Horn, with at least 17 million people facing hunger across eight countries, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.”¹ The drought has so far whipped up a colossal, cascade of humans both within and across international borders as indicated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).² In the month of November 2019, flash floods impacted heavily on the strategic nation of Djibouti. The rain that pounded the country in a single

ⁱClimate change means “a change in the climate system which is caused by significant changes in the concentration of greenhouse gases as a consequence of human activities and which is in addition to natural climate that has been observed during a considerable period” (Kenya Gazette Supplement, Nairobi, 13th May 2016, N0. 68).” In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis defines climate change as a perturbing warming of the entire climatic organ. “In recent decades,” the Pope goes ahead to say “this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events...” (20-21).

day was estimated as equivalent to two years rainfall in the semi-arid nation. According to a joint Djibouti–U.N. Statement: More than a quarter-million people are affected by flash floods on the Red Sea that is home to military bases of the United States, China, and others. Djibouti is known as one of the world’s most vulnerable non-island nations in the face of climate change as sea levels continue escalating.³

The article under discussion examines the impact of climate change in the Horn, climate change as a catalysing factor to migration in the Horn of Africa, climate change and migration related conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the response of the International Organization for Migration (IOM Conference on 7th December 2018) in Djibouti to the challenge of migration in the Horn of Africa. The essay begins with the impact of climate change in the Horn of Africa.

The Impact of Climate Change in the Horn of Africa

Low-average rains, drought, conflict and economic crisis are currently the main drivers of food insecurity in the Horn with Ethiopia, Sudan and S. Sudan envisioned among the countries affected by severe food crisis in the region. The worst-affected countries with regard to acute food insecurity include Ethiopia (8.1 million), Sudan (6.2 million) and S. Sudan (6.1 million).⁴ In South Sudan alone, 59 per cent of the population or six out of 10 people are in need of quick assistance to protect livelihoods, to reduce food consumption gaps and malnutrition.

In Somalia, more than one in five people (or 22 percent of the population) are threatened to suffer severe food insecurity. Due to this alarming food insecurity, the region is said to suffer palpable movements that usually encompass not only refugees and asylum-seeking individuals per se but also titans of migration cum pastoralists who embark on complex migration pathways in such “greener pastures.” Migration in this case thrives as a core means through which individual persons, a community or a family can employ as a survival strategy or as a disaster coping mechanism. Numerous others continue to storm international borders of neighbouring nations like a colossus.

According to the latest census posted by the International Organization Migration (IOM), arrivals oscillate between 200 in Ethiopia and 1,200

in Kenya. Ethiopia alone is currently accommodating about 1 million refugees from the war-torn Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. That notwithstanding, Ethiopia with its generous open-door policy, accommodates over 900,000 people all trickling from neighbouring countries for multiplicity of reasons. Yet, more than 3 million of its nationals reel from conflict and climate-driven displacement.⁵ Given the situation, therefore, it is of critical necessity to closely examine the link between migration and climate change in the Horn as the latter exacerbates the crisis in the region.

Climate Change as a Catalyzing Factor to Migration in the Horn of Africa

In the Horn of Africa, issues related to environmental degradation and ecological imbalance contribute a lot towards migration of people en masse. Migration of people in humongous numbers can be pivotal towards causing an environmental crisis in their original habitats, in migratory routes and pathways and even in their intended destinies. Predictions related to climate change for the 21st century indicate that much more people are expected to migrate as a consequence of weather related-calamities which will become more common and intense due to anthropogenic global warming. Consequently, the Horn is currently susceptible to extreme weather conditions in relation to precipitation and drought as reported in a country like Somalia.

In Kenya, for example, climate change has increased the frequency and magnitude of unfriendly weather in the country hitherto causing rapid loss of lives, diminished livelihoods, minimized crop and livestock production and warped infrastructure among other dreadful effects. For instance, the heavy rains and flash floods from March to May 2018 that affected communities that were recuperating from a perennial drought. Climate change is likely going to affect Kenya's envisioned future development and the anticipated goals of Kenya Vision 2030, the long-term development blueprint-and the government Big Four agenda for 2018-2022⁶ focus on ensuring food and nutrition security, decent housing, manufacturing and affordable health care.

Due to endemic drought patterns in Kenya, about 2.6 million people

are in need of relief food supplies. Of these, 623,000 are children (below five years) and 69,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, who are threatened by malnutrition as drought sweeps through the Northern part of the country.⁷ Turkana is critically affected with 250,000 children below five years in Turkana North, Turkana South and Laisamis sub-counties. Other areas facing acute malnutrition as a consequence of perennial drought are Turkana West, Turkana Central, Baringo, Tana River, Samburu and Moyale.

According to the government spokesperson, “Eight of the 23 counties are severely affected by drought and require urgent enhanced relief food assistance. They include Garissa, Mandera, Wajir, Marsabit, Tharaka-Nithi, Isiolo, Embu and Kitui.”⁸ To mitigate pangs of drought, the government has allocated Sh. 3.7 billion between September and December. Of the 3.7 billion, 2.9 billion will cater for relief food and the distribution of water and nutrition to the affected people. The drought has compelled the government to dispatch reserve stocks and make available Kshs 2 billion to facilitate the distribution and tracking of water in the affected areas. Food stuff including Maize, rice, beans and vegetable oil and supplements worth Kshs 1.7 million have already been distributed by the government between April and August.⁹

Drought and famine are said to play a pivotal role in the migration of people in the Horn of Africa. As stated by Halima, a 30-year-old mother of three displaced in Somalia, “Many people who were displaced cannot return home. The drought in Somalia is happening all the time. People have no way to recover.”¹⁰ The link between migration and drought is quite plausible because drought propels to high levels of food insecurity and unanticipated change of diet hence compelling people to move.

In the Horn, climate change is blamed to cause scarcity of rain or floods that deplete massive acres of food hence leading to unexpected shortages of food and clean water for drinking. For instance, on March 14, 2019, Tropical Cyclone Idai hit the South east coast of Mozambique. The cyclone caused flooding that destroyed 100,000 homes, 1 million acres of crops, and flattened \$ 1 billion of infrastructure. As stated by the UN, “...at least 40% of the population in Somalia does not have enough food and children are affected. A million people are on the brink

of famine in South Sudan, as 20 million risk starvation in countries hit by poor harvests/conflict.”¹¹ More so the long rains which fall between October and December in many parts of the Horn are now reported to be 55 percent less compared to the early 80s. It was only after the El Nino of 1997-1998 when the impact of climate change became palpable. Besides the pronounced lack of sufficient clean water for drinking, persistent droughts are major stumbling blocks to support agricultural activities in large scales in Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, S. Sudan and Djibouti.

Various parts of the world including the Horn of Africa have been experiencing periodic droughts in a row for the past few years. In Kenya, droughts are quite common. Droughts are blamed for the greatest of impacting negatively on Kenyan economy. Remarkable decline in GDP growth was observed in Kenya during the years of poor rains. The agriculture sector grew by 1.6 % in 2017, compared to 4.7% in 2016. This happened mainly because drought suffocated crop production consequently minimizing animal production.¹²

Recorded losses due to drought related losses in livestock, is estimated to have cost \$ 1.08 billion.¹³ Depending on how water as a vital natural resource is managed, this alone can be a major determining factor on how tragic a drought can be. In Ethiopia, for instance, where drought is affecting about 4.5 million people, pastoralist communities require timely support to prevent their livestock from perishing. As indicated by IOM, “...their Cross-border movement in search of water and pasture for their livestock is creating a higher risk for resource-based conflict and further displacement, particularly in the drought-affected Northern Kenya districts of Turkana, Wajir and Mandera, where Global Acute Malnutrition now transcends 30% among children, pregnant and lactating mothers.”¹⁴

In addition, a sequence of devastating floods and severe droughts—some of the worst in decades—has also contributed highly to the total number of displaced persons inside Ethiopia. The number of displaced persons due to climate change is approximated to be about three million people.¹⁵ Drought related migration is said to propel a complex situation of displacement and movement, triggered by conflict and instability and the returns of many Ethiopians and Somalis from Yemen.¹⁶

Climate Change and Migration Related Conflict in the Horn of Africa

Environmental degradation in the Horn of Africa is argued to propel a myriad of effects that include conflict, migration, insufficiency (severe lack of basic needs like water and food) including degradation violence.¹⁷ Environmental degradation has been pivotal in propelling people to migrate hence causing conflict. Migration related conflicts arise as a consequence of competition for resources, demographic characteristics and spatial fluctuating patterns of governance and administration. For H. Dixon, “migration is generally considered to be the intermediate stage which links environmental degradation and disasters to conflict.”¹⁸ Due to a massive environmental crisis, people are forced to migrate in large numbers to other places where they opt to settle with the hope of a better life.

In the year 2012, the Horn of Africa was reported to have had the largest number of refugees globally. By March 2013, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region was about 9 million (IOM). A number of critical factors have been blamed for this massive movement of people. These include: climate change and environmental degradation, lack of economic stability, armed conflict, political, economic and food crisis. Such factors created a dire need for a proportional response to provide food, shelter and security for the victims.

Migration in Somalia and South Sudan has mainly taken place as a consequence of armed conflict. Such a situation compelled people to abandon their homes and seek solace and protection in the neighbouring countries for the good part of 2012. As a result, the number of refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda is said to have increased tremendously. However, currently Uganda has registered about 32% decline in the number of migrants in July 2019. From July 1st to 30th, a total of 8,295 new refugees crossed to Uganda, 6,490 from the D.R.C., while those from S. Sudan were 944 and Burundi, 861.¹⁹ In reference to economic muscle, Kenya and Ethiopia are respectively ranked as the second and third leading host countries in the world for refugees although Uganda is currently hosting over a million refugees from S. Sudan much

more than Ethiopia and Kenya.

At present, Kenya has approximately 600,000 refugees making it the fourth largest host with the vast majority of refugees originating from Somalia.²⁰ Since the political milieu in Somalia is ameliorating with supersonic rapidity, smooth repatriation of Somali refugees is apparently going to be plausible. Severe drought in Somalia alone has triggered an increase in the number of persons soliciting for help in Ethiopia and in Kenya where about 50,000 migrants were reported to have arrived in 2011 (IOM). In July, 2011 alone, over 11,000 migrants gradually arrived in Ethiopia while more than 8,000 arrived in Kenya.

Although Ethiopia is at a graceful transition juncture, sporadic ethnic conflicts are what Ethiopia's disaster prevention chief Mitiku Kassa calls "the unfortunate effect of transitional periods."²¹ Besides ethnic based conflicts, climate change and disease has also contributed enormously towards migration and displacement of people in Ethiopia. In its efforts to adequately address this humanitarian challenge, "Ethiopia is appealing for 1.3 billion from the international community to assist 8.3 million displaced due to ethnic conflict as well as those vulnerable to climate shocks and disease."²² Ethnic-based conflicts and climate change are therefore a common phenomenon in the East and Horn of Africa. Such conflicts as well as climate change are frequently displacing people from their ancestral home-lands hence compelling them to seek asylum and resettlement in other unknown and undesignated places.

Migration Routes in the Horn of Africa

Generally speaking, migration in the Horn of Africa takes place through three main routes: the first one is the Northern Africa route (Sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe); the second is the Gulf of Aden route (from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and eventually to Saudi Arabia). This well-trodden route is also popularly known as Africa via the Mediterranean route since many migrants from the Horn and other parts of Africa use the route to migrate to Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world. Close to 20, 000 migrants, mostly from Ethiopia, attempt the journey along this ancient and increasingly deadly route through Yemen's war zone each month, according to the International Organization for

Migration (IOM).²³ The third migration corridor is the Southern route (from the East and Horn of Africa to South Africa).²⁴

In February 2019, two migrant boats sank off the coast of Djibouti killing 58 people. The scenario of capsizing boats is quite common in Djibouti's Red Sea coast area, as thousands of immigrants from the Horn of Africa traverse the deadly route to reach the Middle East via war-torn Yemen. The migrants target in most cases is to penetrate into Saudi Arabia through Yemen. According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) current statistics, "More than 199 drowning have been recorded off the coast of Obock, Djibouti, since 2014."²⁵ MMP also unveiled incidents of three tragic shipwrecks that occurred in Obock a few days before the sinking of the two migrant boats off the coast of Djibouti. This is an indication that the route is a major conduit of migrants from the region attempting to reach Saudi Arabia. Similar incidents which have occurred since 2014 have been blamed for the deaths of hundreds of desperate migrants along the treacherous Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The strait which is located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, directly links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

The Response of the IOM Conference (7th December 2018 in Djibouti) to the Challenge of Migration in the Horn of Africa

What is the international community doing to guarantee safety for migrants striving to find asylum and stability most especially at the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries? On the 7th of December 2018, IOM co-hosted a Conference in Djibouti to respond to humanitarian needs of migrants in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and the GCC countries. The conference was attended by humanitarian organizations and delegates from Djibouti, Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Somalia, and Yemen. In their attempt to address the malaise, the attending officials together with humanitarian actors came up with six pivotal responses (listed below)²⁶ to address the impasse of humanitarian needs of the migrants. This was unanimously agreed upon to be achieved by:

- 1) Enhancing safe, dignified and voluntary return and sustainable reintegration;

- 2) Ensuring humanitarian access through the respect of humanitarian law;
- 3) Holding smugglers and human traffickers accountable for abuses inflicted on migrants;
- 4) Investing in long-term development and awareness raising initiatives and to address root causes of irregular immigration;
- 5) Providing migrant health interventions and enacting water, sanitation and hygiene measures to prevent and address out-breaks; and
- 6) Continuing to exchange information and best practices on migration management, among others.

In addition to other priority responses, the six points were highlighted in the Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The stratagem was championed by IOM and other collaborators as a plausible approach in responding to the needs of migrants in this particular migrating corridor. In his opening address, the Chair of the meeting, Hassan Omar Mohammed Burhan, Djibouti's Minister of Interior Security, urged countries in the two regions to establish local policies to secure protection and respect of human rights of migrants, most especially for the large number of the unaccompanied minors in need of protection and special assistance.²⁷ Underscoring the same point, Da Vitorio (IOM's Director General) indicated that coming together to find concrete ways to protect all those who cross national borders, regardless of their migratory status or nationality was quite essential. He insisted that Safe and legal pathways for migration will ultimately prove beneficial to all the affected countries.²⁸

The Conference appealed for profound cooperation and collaboration between governments and other willing organizations to consolidate efforts to guarantee, protect and safe-guard humanitarian response to the challenge of migrants heading to Yemen and other Gulf countries from the East and Horn of Africa. Da Vitorio reminded those attending the Conference that IOM remained committed to supporting their efforts to facilitate the following: voluntary humanitarian returns from stranded migrants; to assist those in destitute circumstances; to prevent and treat their health needs and provide dignified and sustainable opportunities for migrants to return home.²⁹ The Conference consisting of key political

and humanitarian agencies in Djibouti was applauded as timely and a commendable move in responding to the impasse of migration in the region. All facts constant, more can be done especially at the intergovernmental level through workable policies to minimize the movement of people in the region.

Conclusion

Climate change is real and its lethal repercussions cannot be shunned. Preserving the Planet Earth therefore is a priority. This fact was highly underscored by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Measures have to be put in place to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. An environment that is well taken care of propels to a balanced ecosystem that could be pivotal in mitigating migration of people due to climate change in the Horn and yonder. Governments in the Horn of Africa can come up with plausible strategies to create awareness about the urgent need for taking care of the environment by planting more trees, by preserving water catchment areas as sacrosanct as well as restraining the dumping of industrial waste into rivers and lakes. The move towards overcoming deforestation and the restoration of degraded lands will definitely restore economic growth, ensure food security and tame migration of people in the Horn of Africa.

¹ Drought Crisis in the Horn of Africa: Millions of People Face Hunger and Illness. [dm.com/en/drought-Crisis-in-horn-of-Africa/a-38950292](https://www.dailymail.com/en/drought-Crisis-in-horn-of-Africa/a-38950292).

² IOM UN MIGRATION: <https://www.IOM.INT> Eastern-Africa-and-Horn-Africa.

³ East Africa struggles with heavy rains, with more to come,

⁴ Oluoch, Fred. Drought, Conflict Expose 27 Million People to Hunger, *The East African*, September 7th-September 13th 2019, 3.

⁵ Ethiopian Weekly Press Digest, "Ethiopia Says \$ 1.3 Billion is Needed to Assist Displaced People," Vol. XXVI, No. 11, March 13, 2019, 9.

⁶ [KCCKP.go.ke/NCCAP-2018-2022](https://www.KCCKP.go.ke/NCCAP-2018-2022).

⁷ S. Oketch, "2.6 Million People in Arid and Semi-Arid Areas Starving," *Saturday Nation*, September 21, 5.

⁸ S. Oketch, "2.6 Million People in Arid and Semi-Arid Areas Starving," *Saturday Nation*, September 21, 5.

⁹ S. Oketch "2.6 Million People in Arid and Semi-Arid Areas Starving," *Saturday Nation*, September 21, 5.

- ¹⁰Migration, Environment and Climate Change-ronairobi.iom.int/migration-and-climate-change.
- ¹¹Drought Crisis in the Horn of Africa-dm.com/en/drought-Crisis-in-horn-of-Africa/a-38950292.
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- ¹³The World Bank (2018) NEDI (The North and North Eastern Development Infrastructure) Boosting Shared Property for the North and North Eastern Counties of Kenya: Nairobi: World Bank.
- ¹⁴[http: Environmentalmigration.iom.int/IOM-publications](http://Environmentalmigration.iom.int/IOM-publications).
- ¹⁵Ethiopian Weekly Press Digest, “The Ethiopian Migrants Braving Yemen’s War to Find A Better Life in Saudi Arabia,” Vol. XXVI, No. 8., February 20, 2019, 7.
- ¹⁶Horn of Africa-<http://Environmentalmigration.IOM.intsearch>.
- ¹⁷Barnett, J. “Destabilizing the Environment-Conflict and Thesis,” Review of International Studies 26: (2000), 977-993.
- ¹⁸Dixon-Homer, T. “On the Threshold: Environmental Change as Cause of Acute Conflict. International Security (1991), 16 (2): 234-260.
- ¹⁹J. Barigaba, “More Refugees From Burundi Enter Uganda,” The East African-September 7th – September 2019, 3.
- ²⁰IOM UN Migration: <https://www.IOM.INT/Eastern-Africa-and-Horn-Africa>.
- ²¹Press Digest, “Ethiopia Says \$ 1.3 Billion is Needed to Assist Displaced People,” 9.
- ²²Press Digest, “Ethiopia Says \$ 1.3 Billion is Needed to Assist Displaced People,” 9.
- ²³Such migrants risk deportation in case the police identify them as migrants. Majority of them are not privy to the tragic and devastating war in Yemen. They are not informed on the treacherous nature of the voyage not to mention the bodies washing along the shores of Djibouti and Yemen.
- ²⁴<http://www.iom.int/East-Africa-and-horn-Africa>.
- ²⁵Ethiopian Weekly Press Digest, 13
- ²⁶IOM UN Migration, “Horn of Africa, Gulf Countries Affirm Dignity, Human Rights of Migrants at A Conference in Djibouti,” 7th December 2018.
- ²⁷IOM UN Migration, “Horn of Africa, Gulf Countries Affirm Dignity, Human Rights of Migrants at A Conference in Djibouti,” 7th December 2018.
- ²⁸IOM UN Migration, “Horn of Africa, Gulf Countries Affirm Dignity, Human Rights of Migrants at A Conference in Djibouti,” 7th December 2018.
- ²⁹IOM UN, “Horn of Africa, Gulf Countries Affirm Dignity, Human Rights of Migrants At a Conference in Djibouti,”