

Church agencies call for action as extreme drought hits eastern Africa

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [May 18, 2022](#) issue

When droughts strike in eastern Africa, clerics, church experts, and faith-based agencies are some of the first to mobilize to address food security and deliver humanitarian aid. Now such groups are moving again as severe drought—the worst in 40 years—unfolds in the east and the Horn of Africa.

Three successive rainy seasons have failed to materialize, and scientists and relief agencies are blaming climate change for bringing droughts in a region battered by conflicts and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The people need support, and we are walking with them in fighting the drought. We are preparing a response from different fronts, which we hope to broaden in the coming days,” said David Mutisya, the Anglican bishop of Garissa, a semiarid county in Kenya’s northeast.

An assessment in the area by Finn Church Aid, Finland’s largest international aid agency, revealed that some of the main water sources—rivers, boreholes, sand dams, and shallow wells—did not have enough water for people and livestock. People were walking seven kilometers to collect water, and 1 million head of livestock had died in the county.

Finn Church Aid is running a cash transfer program in Kenya and Somalia. The program’s focus is children and pregnant or lactating mothers heading households.

“This is another man-made crisis, just like Ukraine, except that the cause of the drought is climate change,” said Jouni Hemberg, executive director of Finn Church Aid. “Those who remember the famine in Ethiopia are haunted by it. This is a similar event across a larger scale, but we have means to prevent the suffering that the 1980s famine caused.”

An estimated 15.5 to 16 million people are in urgent need of food assistance in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, according to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a bloc of eight countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. It is also anticipated that floods in South Sudan will contribute toward another 8 million

people there being pushed into acute food insecurity.

“We have to act now on the basis of a ‘no regret’ approach,” said Workneh Gebeyehu, executive secretary of IGAD.

Gebeyehu called for scaling up programs to protect the lives and livelihoods of farmers, agropastoralists, and pastoralists.

“This will help support their recovery and self-reliance in the immediate and medium term,” he said.

Meanwhile, as he leads efforts to support drought-stricken communities, Mutisya says the motto “Better teach how to fish than to give fish” is ever alive.

“Most of the time, we build the capacity of the communities. We train them on how they can face the challenges,” he said. “We train on farming, provide facilities, build or buy water tanks, or drill boreholes to make water available.” —World Council of Churches