



CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE: THEIR VIEWS OF OUR RESPONSE TO HUNGER & CLIMATE CHANGE IN **SOMALIA**

*“Consult
us on what
concerns us”*



Save the Children



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PHOTO: MUSTAFA SAIED/SAVE THE CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Save the Children Somalia has been at the forefront of promoting child participation in its programming and partnership. With this approach we aim to improve the quality of our programmes, enhance our accountability and achieve the highest possible impact for children as right holders.

Save the Children Somalia support children to meaningfully participate throughout the different stages of a programme's life cycle: designing, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning. To achieve this, Save the Children has invested in various initiatives to incorporate children's voices into our programming. These initiatives include child researchers, child rights groups, child champions, and consultations with children on key issues, all of which keep children engaged in the

relevant Save the Children programming activities.

As part of our work to tackle global hunger and climate change, we held a series of consultations with children to discuss their thoughts on these issues, with a view to including their voices, insights and recommendations into the strategic decisions we make. The discussions enabled our teams to hear from children directly in a forum where they could share their feelings and opinions, in their own words, on how hunger and climate change have affected them, as well as their families and communities. We also consulted children on their views of Save the Children's programmes (including our humanitarian response) and to identify how they could be more involved in both long-term development initiatives and humanitarian responses.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES FACING CHILDREN

Somalia continues to experience climate-related shocks with increased frequency and magnitude for its vulnerable communities. Currently there are warning indicators of a looming drought in Somalia. The impacts of two consecutive below-average rainfall seasons on crop and livestock production are driving up the numbers of families who do not have enough food and need help to survive. In November, the Federal Government of Somalia declared a state of emergency as drought intensified, affecting more than 2.8 million people. 1.2 million children are likely to experience acute malnutrition.

In developing our emergency preparedness plans, we address the projected spike in needs we expect to see in our humanitarian response.





METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative methods, Save the Children's Somalia country office held 12 consultations with children between 21st and 24th September 2021, to discuss the impact of hunger and climate change. We focused on three districts – Baidoa, Burco and Garowe – which were selected while taking into consideration the Integrated Phase Classification¹ (IPC) by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU)²; Baidoa (IPC Phase 3: Crisis – Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Urban), Garowe (IPC Phase 3: Crisis – Rural), and Burco (IDP/Urban: IPC Phase 4 – Crisis).

We consulted with a total of 124 children from the three districts, 63 boys and 61 girls between the ages of 9 and 17. The consultations included children with disabilities, out-of-school children as well as children attending school. We engaged the community structures in place in these three districts to mobilize a random sample of children to consult. We know that girls and boys bring alternative perspectives to issues affecting them. As such, we held separate focus group discussions for boys and girls as well as for younger (9-12 years) and older children (13-17 years) to allow them to feel comfortable to share their views freely.

¹ FSNAU Classifies the districts into 5 IPC phases with increasing severity; Phase 1 – Minimal, Phase 2 – Stressed, Phase 3 – Crisis Phase 4 – Emergency and Phase 5 – Famine.

² [FSNAU IPC Results: Population Table](#)

	9-12 years old		13-17 years olds		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Baidoa	12	11	9	11	43
Burco	10	10	10	10	40
Garowe	10	9	12	10	41
Total	32	30	31	31	124

To ensure the children were able to fully participate, and that we followed the nine basic requirements for meaningful and ethical child participation, our facilitators used several child participatory activities, including but not limited to H-Assessment, body mapping, vision tree and circle analysis. The questions and participation guides were implemented in Somali and the responses were translated back to English. Qualitative data was then collated, analysed and summarised by themes for reporting.

In line with Save the Children's guidelines, before beginning the consultations with children, we conducted a refresher training

on child protection and safeguarding for the facilitators, and provided them with all the tools and contacts to refer any safeguarding concerns while they were working directly with children. The facilitators held the consultations in child friendly, inclusive locations, and led sessions with children of the same gender as the facilitator. Throughout the consultations, the facilitators observed COVID-19 measures by holding the sessions in spacious venues, limiting the number of children per consultation, maintaining a safe distance at all times, and using sanitizer and masks.





FINDINGS

Impact of hunger on children, their families and communities

Our consultation with children has revealed the clear impact of hunger on children, their families and communities. Both boys and girls, irrespective of their age, indicated that hunger affected their appearance, and that their bodies became thin and pale. It also led to lack of physical strength needed for their day-to-day activities; tiredness, difficulty walking, a lack of energy to play with their friends, as well as physical symptoms such as stomach ache, diarrhoea and headache. The majority of the children also mentioned they experience emotional and psychological distress, mainly worry, nervousness, irritability, aggressiveness and restlessness. Most children also mentioned dehydration and poor nutrition as another side effect of hunger.

Children's attendance at school has also suffered because of hunger. They mentioned that hunger deprives them of the energy they require to walk to and from school, and while in school, they lack focus. In some instances, their families migrate in search of food and water, and that causes them to miss or drop out of school.

Girls shared that they were more likely to be forced into work or early marriage as a result of hunger. Some girls resorted to working as a 'home help' for wealthier families. Boys mentioned that they felt pressured into joining armed groups, and were more likely to need to find work, such as shoe-shining or car washing.



“Hunger has many effects on our families and communities. The most obvious is family breakdown due to fighting. It can also impact children and cause things such as school dropouts, as our families are unable to provide our essentials, let alone send us to school, which then results in child labour”

13-17 year old boy from Janayo IDP Camp, Baidoa.

“In search of income my mum took me to a neighbour's friend in the city to work for her by doing all the household chores. I was 11 years old and I was doing a lot of work that adults do. I have had to go through the worst but I am very happy I am out of that situation”

13-17 year old girl.



According to the children, some of their family units have also suffered from the impact of hunger and climate change. The majority of the children in the consultations mentioned their family separated during the hunger season; in some instances, the head of the household – mostly the father but in some instances the mother – left home in search of food and water, while in other cases children were sent to live with wealthier neighbours, friends and relatives during the hunger seasons.

Children said that there was an increase in disagreements over daily expenses and fighting due to the stress caused by hunger, which in some cases resulted in families splitting up (for example, one of the parents leaving).

At the community level, the children reported an increase in crime where, for instance, in Janayo camp for internally displaced people in Baidoa, girls aged 9-12 said there was a lot of stealing, especially of food and money. In cases where the drought situation persists, children mentioned that their community also lost their livestock, and their crops didn't yield as much as expected, leading to acute food shortages. This results in the inflation of food prices meaning families are left struggling to meet their basic needs and are forced to sell their assets or relocate to other camps for people forced to move from their homes, or cheaper towns.

How children and families are adapting to hunger and climate change

To adapt to the prevailing hunger situation, children mentioned that their families adjust their meal sizes, variety and frequency; some children eat smaller portions while others skip some meals as well as eat less nutritious meals.

Many children adapt by eating with their friends, neighbours or relatives; children mentioned that their parents send them to eat in their relatives' or neighbours' homes while the adults stay behind. Most children told us that their families borrow food on credit or share within their communities; while a few families get help through humanitarian support.

Some children talked about having to drop out of school to work for wages to complement the household's income. Boys

look for menial work such as washing cars, and shoe-shining, while girls work as house helps for wealthier families. Some children mentioned that they depend on restaurants for meals in exchange for labour, or they get leftovers as handouts. Others beg in the streets and market places to help their families out. Girls talked about taking up more responsibilities at home, such as water collection and gathering wood to cook the food (which increases their risk of sexual assault). A few boys mentioned that they resorted to theft, and some left to live and work on the streets.

Other coping mechanisms that children mentioned are used by their families include giving their siblings away for early marriage, migrating from big cities to smaller cities, or to the settlement camps where life is cheaper, and several children said their families had to sell their belongings to survive.



“ I am from a big family, my mother told us that sometimes we shall have to skip meals, it happened because there is no food and money. She said, "Come on let us drink water and sleep ”

13-17 year old boy
from Garowe

“ During the hunger season we used to go to other relatives' houses to eat while the adults stay at home, since there was not enough food for all of us ”

9-12 year old girl
from Baidoa





Children's perspectives on our response and other humanitarian responses on hunger

Children reported that they were generally happy with Save the Children's work including school feeding programs, provision of learning materials, and the child rights activities in their communities, including child-friendly spaces. However, they underlined they are not often consulted or invited to meetings to discuss issues that affect them. They emphasized they should be given an active role in the consultations, particularly when the organizations want

to provide school uniforms, school meals and learning materials. The children believed that they can share valuable insights about which materials would be most useful.

Children feel that humanitarian actors do not engage them in decision making on important issues, and yet when they do involve them, they do not take their opinions seriously in their response. They mentioned that adults mostly take decisions on their behalf, without ever taking their voices into consideration. They recommended that humanitarian actors include children in their processes in order to hear their voices and increase

“We need children to be the centre of discussion of everything that revolves around the world we live in. Perhaps have children's groups that represent us and voice our concerns”

13-17 year old boy



their involvement in decision making. Girls involved in the consultation talked about how few female workers they see working in humanitarian support, and this impacted on their ability to report safeguarding concerns. They recommended that more female workers are involved in humanitarian responses to support on any safeguarding concerns that may arise. Children were concerned about possible sexual exploitation by male NGO workers, and suggested that unplanned pregnancies may happen as a result. Female children noted that they feel more comfortable when assisted by fellow female humanitarian workers, instead of men.

When asked for ideas to strengthen the response to hunger, children recommended monthly food distribution for the most vulnerable families, more school feeding programs to make it easier for children to stay in school or for children to start going to school, and providing financial support for school fees and education materials. They also suggested raising awareness on the impact of climate change, ending early marriage, and prioritizing children with disabilities. They strongly felt that children should be allowed to participate in decision making and that their voices should be taken seriously. In addition, children emphasise the importance of providing emotional support for children affected by hunger.

Key actions that children think will help in tackling hunger in their community

Children were anxious about how to tackle hunger in their community, as they

understood the impact hunger will have on their future. Many children are already out of school and this makes them feel more worried, given the deteriorating situation. They recommended that international organizations, along with the government, take further steps to tackle climate change and global warming, and the role they play in causing hunger.

The children want humanitarian agencies to focus on the day-to-day challenges of their communities – especially their poor living conditions. Children suggested that giving regular food, jobs, and training were key to tackling the hunger crisis in their community. Children also asked that humanitarian agencies continue to support them and their families, and wanted agencies to raise more awareness around hunger and the impact on them. They also asked for water to be provided to their communities, as well as ensuring food was given in schools – as this would help ensure that children can go to school, and continue going to school.

In all the sessions held, children talked about being more involved in issues that concern them, including the ongoing hunger situation. They recommended that humanitarian workers should improve the way they run child association groups and clubs in schools so that the children knew that when they shared their views, the adults would listen to them, and act on what they have said. The children also suggested creating special clubs for children who are not in school, as the existing clubs are all school-based. To ensure that the girls' views are also captured, the children recommended separate sessions for girls to share their opinions freely. In

the consultations with the girls aged 9-12 in Puntland, they emphasised the need for female teachers and mentors as they would share their concerns through them.

They also suggested doing advocacy and campaigns on the theme of hunger for their communities, suggesting that community members should stand by each other and help each other out when they feel the impact of hunger in their communities. Children also recognised that they could use their own skills and networks to share information about hunger and its effects with their friends, and asked if there was any training Save the Children could offer to help them to do this well.

Children mentioned that when humanitarian agencies run community consultations, they should be careful to include children as well as adults, as the consultations are a key step in understanding and tackling hunger, and they wanted to be involved and had important thoughts to share. Children believe that by talking to them and adults before starting a project, they can help humanitarian agencies to make their project better. Children want to work together with humanitarian agencies to tackle hunger and help their community.

Children's recommendations for strengthening the response to hunger

Children recommended that training and jobs are a good solution to hunger, as they last a long time. Children also suggested that providing money is very helpful because it allows families to grow crops, have animals and start businesses, which will last longer [than one-off aid]. Children also suggested training other children and communities on hunger and how to survive.

As well as money and jobs, children also said that they wanted to know more about the situation facing them and other communities, and that humanitarian agencies should share more information with them. Children are interested in campaigns to tackle hunger, and want humanitarian agencies to work together with each other, and them, to create a long lasting change in their situation.

Some children shared that the support they had received from humanitarian agencies was less than they had expected, and that sometimes there are delays in giving them and their families the support. Children were very clear that when hunger is affecting them fast action saves lives.

“ One thing we would like from Save the Children is to include us in the committees for Internally Displaced People. You see only adults are contacted when it comes to any response given. I know we have our child clubs but when it comes to decision making we are not always consulted. So we would love to participate in the decision making when it comes to responding to hunger because I believe we can contribute ”

9-12-year-old girl –
Baidoa



Children's ideas of how they can be involved in decision-making on the issue of hunger

Children understand the role they can play in response to hunger; they recommend being involving from the beginning. The children suggested including girls' community decision-making groups, strengthening school-based child-community groups, conducting regular consultation meetings, and providing children with more information on the crisis. Children believe they can play a role in creating awareness on climate change and hunger through their school clubs, sport events, and school competitions with the support of their teachers.

Children recommended that humanitarian organisations find a way to ensure that

their words are listened to, by those in charge. Children who participated in the consultation session clearly indicated that their voices are not always included, and they are not involved in the current response to hunger, but they desperately want to be. They believe they have a role in raising awareness of hunger and how to survive when you are hungry, and the effects of climate change.

The future

Following the consultations with children which brought to light how hunger and climate change impact them, and how we can improve our humanitarian response to hunger, Save the Children will hold a follow-up session with the children to report back on the findings in a child friendly format, and to discuss next steps.

PHOTO: MARIEKE VAN DER VELDEN/SAVE THE CHILDREN



Below is a summary of the recommendations from children to strengthen the response to hunger.

1. Share more information with the community, including with children:

Children want to be informed of the outcome of the consultations and involved in the discussions that take place afterwards. They also mentioned that they would share the information with their friends, increasing awareness on the impact of hunger and enabling them to speak out on these issues for themselves.

2. Humanitarian organisations should capture children's voices in decision making processes, and that they should:

- Increase the frequency of consultations with children
- Give children active roles during the consultations, for instance advocacy and awareness raising among their peers and within their communities

3. Strengthen or establish child rights groups and other community-based groups where children's voices can be captured, including:

- Separate sessions for boys and girls
- Increasing the number of female teachers, mentors and workers in the humanitarian

space so that they can support girls and ensure that girls feel comfortable to share safeguarding concerns

- Improving how community groups for children are run including groups for out of school children
- Forming 'Children Committees' with representatives who can advocate for children at meetings

4. Support communities; both with tangible assistance such as providing cash support, school feeding programs and school fees, and also help for children who are struggling with their mental health:

Further consultations will be held in the future, to continue to work alongside children to understand their perspective and hear their opinions on our response to hunger and climate change.

Save the Children commits to using this report to advocate within the wider humanitarian sector to come up with possible action points to address these recommendations from children.



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REPORT ON CHILDREN'S CONSULTATION ON HUNGER **SOMALIA**



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