



Reporting the human dimensions of climate change in the developing world

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Posted by: **Jennifer Guay** Posted date: **May 22, 2014** In: **Food Security** | comment : 0

UNITED NATIONS, UNEARTH News – Thousands of people living in the Horn of Africa, the continent's poorest region, are at risk of being displaced due to climate crisis, according to a new report by the [United Nations University](#) (UNU) and the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (NRC).

The UNU/NRC [report](#) released on Wednesday details massive displacement from Horn of Africa countries Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti to Kenya, Egypt, and Yemen. In 2011, a major drought in the Horn developed into famine, impeding small-scale farmers' livelihoods and forcing them to seek work outside of their borders.

"We're seeing dry spells during the rainy season, seasonal shifts, and patterns that have changed over the years, and this has an extreme effect on the pastoralists who are used to regular patterns," Tamer Afifi, Associate Academic Officer at the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security and the report's co-author, told **UNEARTH News**. "The biggest concern of all the people we spoke to is whether they would be able to find work."

The Horn of Africa is a fragile region plagued by conflict and largely populated by pastoralists with little education and climate-sensitive occupations. The extreme weather events affecting its 103 million residents are exacerbated by poverty, violence, and ethnic and political discrimination.

A case in point is the armed conflict in Somalia that has escalated the effects of the country's 2010 and 2011 drought and its subsequent famine. The dry spell resulted in the world crop yield in 17 years, high animal mortality rates, and soaring food prices. Most people surveyed for the report cited a lack of work as their main reason for leaving Somalia. Kenya was home to 482,390 Somalis in December 2013, making it the largest displaced Somali community in Africa.

"Somalia is considered very, very vulnerable to climate change because it's such a fragile state with all the conflict going on," Vikram Kolmannskog, an independent consultant for the NRC and Afifi's co-author, told **UNEARTH News**. "People are very severely affected there, but so is Africa in general as a continent because of its low adaptive capacity to climate change."

According to the report, most refugees fled without legal paperwork, money, or personal items, and were often separated from their families. Under current conventions, environmental refugees are not considered lawful refugees. Formal refugee statuses vary by country and circumstance: Somalis refugees were awarded status in Kenya and Yemen, since the disasters they faced were seen as a threat to human security; meanwhile, Somalis in Egypt and Ethiopians in Yemen fall outside of existing refugee laws and risk limited access to assistance.

"All the host countries mentioned in the report are themselves developing countries, so they have their own problems regarding poverty and political and social issues," Kolmannskog told **UNEARTH News**. "So, receiving refugees from other countries on top of all that is a challenge for them."



Displaced Somali children play outside United Nations refugee camp in Dabaab, Kenya. Photo credit: UNHCR UN Refugee Agency

“Yemen is already struggling with its own conflict, and Kenya has the security issue with al-Shabab terrorism,” Afifi added. “They’re all experiencing a lot of challenges with all these people coming into their borders. At the same time, they’re being very, very generous taking them in – particularly Kenya and Yemen.”

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