

THE ICRC RESPONSE TO THE EL NINO FLOODING IN SOMALIA

OCTOBER 2023 - JANUARY 2024



In late August 2023, based on meteorological forecasts from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and other sources, and in anticipation of severe humanitarian need, the ICRC took the decision to pivot the Somalia programme to prepare for and respond to expected extreme flooding caused by El Niño. Existing activities in the south of Somalia were put on hold and the Delegation refocus on expected riverine flooding along the Shabelle and Juba rivers in October. **This is the first instance of the ICRC undertaking an Anticipatory Action based approach at a whole of delegation level, using scientific climate data to anticipate, prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises at scale ahead of disaster striking.**

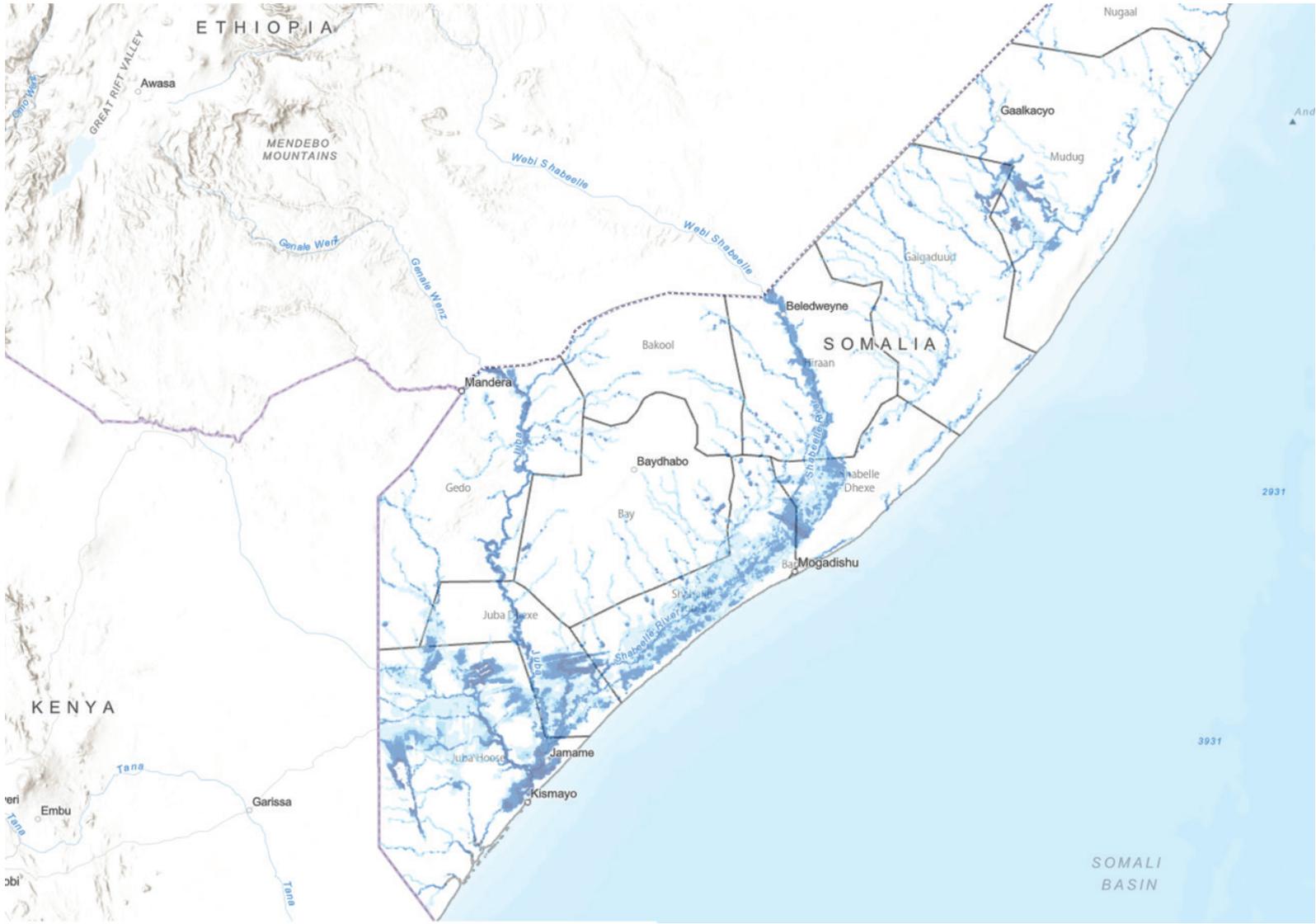
This document provides a brief analysis of the response, actions undertaken by the ICRC and its partner the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and key learning points.

CONTEXT AND KEY DELIVERABLES

From early 2024 meteorological forecasting predicted a strong confluence of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IDP) and El Niño. From May forecast models began strongly indicating heavy rains for the Horn of Africa possibly on a scale of the 1997 and 2006 floods, which had a substantial humanitarian impact.

Rains began in Somalia mid-October with **heavy flooding reported from the 26th October**, first along the Juba and then the Shabelle rivers. As of 26th

December, OCHA Somalia reported approx. 2.5 million people affected by flooding of whom **1.2 million were displaced, with Jubaland and South West State the most affected areas**. Road transport was cut, and two major bridges washed away. Key needs identified were for shelter, WASH and medical support. Rains and riverine flooding began to subside in early December and standing water remaining in many areas until early January.



Flood data predictions received from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre in August 2023

ICRC AND SRCS MITIGATION ACTIVITIES

Activities focused on the south of the country, in Hirshabelle, Juba and Southwest states, the most conflict affected parts of the country. Work was undertaken in both government held and Al Shabaab held areas.

In total a minimum of 100,000 households (600,000) people received some form of direct support from the ICRC in relation to the El Niño response. An estimated **40,000 households** (half of whom in Al Shabaab influenced or controlled areas) living in the vicinity of 85 water points **benefited from access to clean water** through protecting water points, while a further **3,000 households were able to benefit daily from potable water** provided via ten filtration units. **17 health facilities** were protected and remained operational, 5,250 cases of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) were treated. Approximately 8,000 vulnerable households were supported with cash, and a further **25,000 households received hygiene kits, 3,900 received shelter and hygiene kits and nutritional support was provided to 745 households.** Urban populations benefited from dewatering and drainage and **many thousands received regular warnings** and updates on the flooding through radio and social media messaging. The Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) provided a search & rescue and dead body management service, and ICRC supported SRCS PFL activities aiming to reunite families separated by the disaster.

Protection of **water points**, provision of **manual water** purification units and provision of **sandbags** to protect infrastructure were mainly undertaken ahead



A group of people being evacuated by the SRCS boat rescue team

of flooding. Protecting and stocking of **health units** was also timely and effective. Activities requiring substantial procurement and distribution was less timely. Access to Al Shabaab areas has been successful in some areas but remains challenging in the south in particular. Humanitarian access was granted following multiple requests from the ICRC, but only once the rains and flooding had made access impossible.

Activities were undertaken within the existing ICRC budget, requiring a rapid reorientation of plans, expenditure plans and a redistribution of budgets internally. No additional funding was sought or received

Access to communities is difficult during flooding because of road blockage.



A farmer in Beledweyne town protects his farm with sandbags



LEARNING POINTS

Hydrological and climate data was crucial to an effective response. Long range forecasts were an important strategic support in deciding overall direction of the programme. Rolling five-day forecasts of expected localized flooding at pre identified key points played an important tactical operational role in warning and preparing the ICRC/SRCS response in priority zones, and to inform local communities in those areas prepare themselves for likely flooding. Working closely with agencies that can provide meteorological and hydrological forecasting is something the ICRC will seek to strengthen both in Somalia and institutionally in the coming years, through partnerships and collaboration.

The eight-week window provided ahead of the flooding allowed for a well-planned response. An anticipatory action approach facilitated internal aspects of ICRC work that traditionally take time – planning, procurement, and transport. It bought time to identify priority areas where the ICRC could provide the most added value: for purchasing and transporting items to where they were needed; for consultation with the SRCS to protect assets (offices, warehousing, health centres) and preposition supplies; for an anticipatory series of activities to protect water points and reinforcing health stocks; and for an outsourced community engagement programme and provision of warning messages.

Early response was cost effective – Anticipatory Action facilitated purchase and distribution ahead of the flooding. The additional time available due to early preparedness planning from August allowed the ICRC to go through normal procurement and logistics channels resulting in substantial savings compared to the alternatives likely during a crisis. The tender process was able to operate as normal, and locally procured items were purchased in non-stressed market conditions. Items purchased in Kenya were delivered through the usual road and ship routes rather than requiring AirOps, items purchases in Somalia were at normal market prices, and most in-country deliveries were via road ahead of these being closed due to flooding.

The SRCS was a crucial partner in preparing for and responding to the humanitarian impact of the floods. SRCS identified community and health sites needing flood protection, provided warehousing, undertook search, rescue and dead body management, and distributed hygiene and shelter kits.

Activities less dependent on procurement, import and distribution were particularly timely. Anticipatory action to protect wells and water points, and to reinforce and resupply health centres were completed before the onset of flooding.

A truck of humanitarian assistance being loaded.



Communities securing water points with sandbags.



CHALLENGES

Even with a six-eight week window to prepare – this timeframe proved insufficient for the procurement and delivery of many items. Despite preparations, many of ICRC's actions were later than ideal, impacting the quality of the response. Some of this was due to factors beyond the ICRC's control, for instance it was only when floods had prevented access that Al Shabaab finally agreed to ICRC assistance, delaying delivery of shelter and hygiene kits. While most material arrived just ahead of flooding in ICRC and SRCS warehouses in offices and antennas, it was often too late for onward distribution to affected populations due to road and access challenges. Some items such as shelter materials and hygiene kits had to be trans-shipped from trucks to small rafts for the final leg of their delivery.

Where the ICRC did have in-country stocks, for example medical supplies and drugs, preparedness and delivery was much faster, anticipatory action undertaken in good time and outcomes easier to evidence (no dramatic rise in morbidity or mortality rates in those areas for example).

Strengthening contingency and preparedness planning, stockpiles and training is crucial. The programme would have benefited from more detailed contingency and preparedness plans, developed jointly with the SRCS. Developing a single Red Cross Red Crescent capacity strengthening plan with the SRCS will be crucial to improving the SRCS branch capacity to respond effectively and professionally to a range of shocks. Both organisations will review the Somalia flooding response jointly with the and identify areas of good practice to be reinforced, and weaknesses to be tackled.

Agreeing anticipatory triggers would have facilitated an effective and timely response. The identification of conflict or climate crisis triggers (related to humanitarian indicators of nutrition, health, displacement and hydrological and climate data, and operational criteria such as geographical and operational focus, existence of other actors, agreement of local authorities etc) ahead of a shock. These triggers could be a combination of humanitarian indicators and operational criteria.



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