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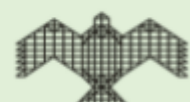


IN FOCUS

## Droughts in East Africa: A climate disaster

AFRICA IN BRIEF

Regional | Economy | Gender | Climate Change | Migration | Peace and Conflict  
| International | Sports



## COMMENTARY

**Droughts in East Africa: A climate disaster**

*Droughts in East Africa are the worst drought in the last four decades. Scientists suggest that such exceptional drought would not have occurred without climate change. Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia are witnessing inter-community conflicts, displacement, hunger, and malnutrition due to the continuing droughts. With multiple crises at the fore, the countries have limited capacities to manage such disasters and need assistance from regional and global actors.*

**Akriti Sharma**



Image source: Eduardo Soteras, AFP

On 27 April, The Washington Post published an article “Climate change caused catastrophic East Africa drought, scientists say” which looked at the causes and impacts of the East African droughts. The article is based on a study done by World Weather Attribution titled “Human-induced climate change increased drought severity in Horn of Africa” which highlights the key scientific findings of the persisting droughts in the region and its major fallouts. According to the report, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia have been witnessing extreme drought conditions for the past three years. The following article looks at some of the key takeaways of the report.

### **1. The climate change link**

Droughts in East Africa are caused by extreme weather conditions coupled with less rain and extremely hot and dry temperatures making them the worst drought in the last four decades. Southern parts of Ethiopia, Somalia, and eastern Kenya have received below-average rainfall in the last three years. Such a weather anomaly is a one-in-a-ten-year

event. Scientists believe that such a drought would have not occurred without climate change. Erratic rainfall patterns have been persistent in Africa with longer and wetter rains in the western parts and severe drought conditions in the East. An extreme weather event of such a magnanimous scale is caused by human-induced climate change. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report forecasted an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events of similar conditions.

Prolonged drought conditions have had multifaceted fallouts and have furthered the existing vulnerability of the population in the East African region. It has led to increased hunger, crop failures, migration, deaths, and conflict in the region. The population in the region is highly vulnerable to an already existing nexus of issues such as poverty, inequality, hunger, malnutrition, disease, and conflict. Climate change has pushed the population to face severe food and water shortage, pasture degradation, and livestock losses. Farming is the major activity that sustains the population of the region and with droughts, people have lost their major sources of livelihood. In Kenya, after the declaration of a drought emergency in 2021, vulnerable groups such as lactating women, children, and older populations were exposed to malnutrition and needed humanitarian assistance. In Ethiopia and Somalia, 1.2 billion people have migrated across borders due to droughts which led

to mass dropout of children in schools. Resource scarcity has led to various inter-community conflicts and disease outbreaks. This reflects the capacity of climate change to exacerbate persisting vulnerabilities.

## **2. Delayed response followed by fragmented disaster response and management**

The impacts of the droughts can be managed through early warning and management, however, the response has varied in all three countries. Kenya has been proactive in disaster management through the National Drought Management Authority engaged in developing coping strategies and policy coordination among the institutions for early warning and response. Somalia's response seems highly fragmented due to chronic humanitarian conditions and limited institutional capacity. The African Union has aided both countries through Africa Risk Capacity. Ethiopia, embroiled in political conflict, had little room for disaster response. However, with years of droughts, communities have developed household-coping strategies to manage the droughts which is necessary but inadequate to manage such an exceptional drought. In 2020, the drought was already forecasted by various weather agencies due to La Nina projections but a delayed response was also predicted. Kenya declared drought a national emergency only a year later calling out for humanitarian assistance. Management of disasters requires not only an early warning but an early response.

## **3. Relevance of loss and damage**

The continuing drought in the East African region is a classic example of "loss and damage" which is the third pillar of climate action after mitigation and adaptation. With inadequate global action to curb emissions, such events are forecasted to increase and require collective mechanisms to be dealt with.

The aftermath of extreme weather events is beyond the gamut of mitigation and adaptation and restoration of pre-disaster conditions requires financial assistance. At COP 27, the concept of loss and damage was introduced as a major step towards compensating the vulnerable communities which face drastic impacts of climate change due to the global increase in emissions and hence it is a collective responsibility to compensate them for the damage caused. However, UNFCCC is yet to establish a Loss and Damage Fund which was agreed to at COP27 in Egypt. The population in the region is in dire need of funds to cope with the drought and sustain their livelihoods.

## **Conclusion**

Droughts in East Africa reflect how climate change is manifesting and exposing vulnerable regions of the world to extreme conditions which are beyond adaptive capacity and mitigation measures. Droughts have been occurring in parts of Latin America and South Asia in the past few years making them highly frequent across different regions. Even while pursuing global climate action, such weather anomalies will continue to rise and push vulnerable populations to face the consequences without having any historical responsibility for causing climate change. Apart from a scientific study, it also highlights how such weather anomalies can further socioeconomic vulnerabilities including poverty and conflict.

The report also points out limited climate finance as one of the barriers to undertaking coping strategies. Developed countries have been lagging in their climate financing commitments. East African droughts can push the "loss and damage" debate in the global climate forums in favour of vulnerable communities across the globe. Droughts in East Africa are a global climate concern and demand international and regional

support to address acute food, water, and energy insecurity. Climate change is pushing vulnerabilities in communities and regions. Countries with limited resources, especially the least developed and developing countries, do not have the capacity to manage such extreme weather events and they require attention and assistance from the international community. Additionally, in the backdrop of post-pandemic recovery, global inflation, rise in food and energy prices the drought response of the governments in the region has been affected. The UN and

the African Union can help bring the droughts in East Africa to international attention through global climate summits.

*Note: The above commentary was originally published in the NIAS Conflict Weekly.*

## AFRICA IN BRIEF

26 April - 2 May

By Anu Maria Joseph

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### SUDAN

#### UK accused of delaying German evacuation operations

On 27 April, senior German political sources told the BBC that the UK's efforts to evacuate its embassy staff from Sudan hindered evacuation efforts of German citizens. They accused the British forces of landing in Sudan without the consent of the Sudanese army while other European countries were hoping to airlift their citizens. The sources said that the "unannounced British military presence" angered the Sudanese army and after which they refused access to the facility. The UK Ministry of Defence described the allegations as "complete nonsense." ("Sudan crisis: UK accused of delaying German evacuation efforts," *BBC*, 27 April 2023)

#### Rival factions agrees to hold peace talks

On 2 May, UN's special representative to Sudan, Volker Perthes told Associated Press that Sudan's rival factions have agreed to send their representatives for peace talks, potentially in Saudi Arabia. The same day, the foreign ministry of South Sudan said that the rival parties in Sudan has agreed "in principle" to a week-long ceasefire which would begin from 4 May. Meanwhile, the fighting had continued despite the three-day ceasefire. The clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has now reached a third week accusing each other of violating the agreed ceasefires. South Sudan's President Salva Kiir emphasised on the need for a long-lasting ceasefire in order to begin peace talks. Meanwhile, the UN reported that nearly 100,000 Sudanese had left the country amid the conflict. ("Sudan rivals agree to 'stable ceasefire' talks - UN,"

*BBC*, 2 May 2023; "Sudan rivals agree 'in principle' to a week's truce," *BBC*, 2 May 2023; "Sudan faces catastrophe as 100,000 flee war - UN," *BBC*, 2 May 2023)

#### UK relocates Sudanese envoy to Ethiopia

On 28 April, the UK government relocated its ambassador to Sudan to neighbouring Ethiopia and temporarily closed its embassy in Sudan. The British Foreign Office stated: "From Addis Ababa, he will lead the UK's diplomatic efforts in the region to bring fighting to an end in Sudan." The move was followed after the evacuation of 536 British nationals from the conflict-riven Sudan. ("UK relocates its Sudanese ambassador to Ethiopia," *BBC*, 28 April 2023)

### ETHIOPIA

#### Thousands of multiple nationalities cross into Ethiopia from Sudan

On 26 April, Ethiopian authorities told the BBC that thousands of people belonging to multiple nationalities fleeing Sudan fighting have crossed the border into Ethiopia. A spokesperson from the Amhara region, Gizachew Muluneh, said that those who have arrived include people from Turkey and Yemen along with Sudanese and Ethiopian nationals. A statement from the regional authorities said that more than 15 buses carrying people are arriving in Sudan daily. ("Thousands of foreigners cross into Ethiopia from Sudan," *BBC*, 26 April 2023)

#### Government agrees to resume negotiations over GERD

On 27 April, Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it is ready to resume tripartite negotiations with Egypt and Sudan regarding the issue over

the Grand Renaissance Dam (GERD). State Minister of Foreign Affairs Mesganu Arga announced the decision while talking with the US special envoy to the Horn of Africa, Mike Hammer. The ministry stated through Twitter: "Regarding GERD [Ambassador Mesganu] said Ethiopia is ready to resume the tripartite negotiations under the auspices of the AU." The relations between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan have strained over the construction and operation of the dam, which demands a legal agreement regarding the same. ("[Ethiopia says ready to resume Nile dam negotiations](#)," *BBC*, 27 April 2023)

### KENYA

#### **Opposition resumes protests**

On 2 May, major opposition leader in Kenya, Raila Odinga, resumed protests against the rising cost of living and election irregularities. Initially, the protests began in March, but were later suspended after Odinga and Kenyan President William Ruto agreed to hold talks. The disagreements during the talks led to the resumption of the protests. Besides, the authorities had banned opposition protests claiming "in the interests of national security," and citing violence during the previous demonstrations. ("[Police deployed ahead of Kenya opposition protests](#)," *BBC*, 2 May 2023)

### SOUTH AFRICA

#### **Presidency clarifies statement on exiting ICC**

On 26 April, the South African presidency clarified a previous statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa that the country would be exiting the International Criminal Court (ICC). On 25 April, during a talk with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, who was on a state visit to South Africa, Ramaphosa stated that the governing African National Congress (ANC) had resolved to quit the ICC over "unfair treatment". However, the presidency later clarified in a statement that regrettable, Ramaphosa had made an error. The South

African government is under pressure to take a decision on the arrest warrant of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is due to visit the country this year for the BRICS summit. ("[South Africa remains participant in ICC - Presidency](#)," *Africanews*, 26 April 2023)

### BURKINA FASO

#### **At least 33 soldiers killed in jihadist attack**

On 28 April, BBC reported that at least 33 soldiers were killed in north-east Burkina Faso. An army statement said that Islamist militants active in the region are suspected to be behind the attack. The incident marked the second similar attack over a week killing dozens of soldiers. Over 100 civilians were killed in the region by what the local officials described as men in military uniform. Non-governmental organisations reported that over 10,000 civilians and soldiers have been killed in various attacks since the beginning of this year. ("[Thirty-three soldiers killed in Burkina Faso attack](#)," *BBC*, 28 April 2023)

### HORN OF AFRICA

#### **Climate change behind the worst drought, WWA analysis**

On 27 April, Al Jazeera reported on a study by the World Weather Attribution on the continuing severe drought in the Horn of Africa. The analysis says that the drought has left more than 4.35 million people in the region in dire need of humanitarian aid. Besides, 43,000 people in Somalia are estimated to have died in 2022. According to the study, climate change is a major driver behind the worst drought. A climate scientist with the Kenya Meteorological Department who worked with WWA, Joyce Kimutai said: "Climate change has made this drought exceptional." ("[Global warming made Horn of Africa drought possible: WWA study](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 27 April 2023)

## MIGRATION

### At least 55 migrants killed after a boat sank off the Libyan coast

On 26 April, the UN's migration agency said that at least 55 migrants were killed after a boat carrying 60 people sank off the coast of Libya. The boat capsized while sailing from a town to the east of the capital, Tripoli. Five migrants, including a Syrian child survived. The Libyan coast is a common departure point for the migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. ("[Migrant boat sinks off Libya killing 55 passengers](#)," *BBC*, 26 April 2023)

### Coastguards recovers 41 bodies of migrants off Tunisian coast

On 28 April, BBC reported on coastguards recovering the bodies of 41 migrants off the Tunisian coast. A senior official said that more than 200 people drowned over the past week. A justice official in the port city of Sfax, Faouzi Masmoudi said: "On Tuesday [25 April], we had more than 200 bodies, well beyond the capacity of the hospital, which creates a health problem." The UN migration agency said that a total of nearly 300 migrants died, including those departing from the Libyan coast, over the past week. It added that more than 800 people died this year alone. ("[More than 200 migrants die off Tunisia in just 10 days](#)," *BBC*, 28 April 2023)

## INTERNATIONAL

### Japanese prime minister visits Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique

On 1 May, Africanews reported on Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to Africa. He began his visit in Egypt. He will also be visiting Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique. In Egypt Kishida held a meeting with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi. During a press conference after the meeting between the leaders Al Sissi said: "We reviewed the challenges the international arena is witnessing today, in particular the massive economic repercussions left by the Ukrainian crisis on developing countries that exceeded what the coronavirus pandemic caused in terms of a rise in inflation rates, energy and food prices, and expectations of a decline in the growth rate." He added: "We discussed many regional issues of common concern, especially the Palestinian issue and the situation in Libya. Developments in Sudan occupied an important aspect of the talks." ("[Japan's PM lands in Accra after kicking off African tour in Egypt](#)," *Africanews*, 1 May 2023)

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## About the authors

Akriti Sharma is Phd Scholar at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Anu Maria Joseph is a Research Assistant at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.



### About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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### About the team

#### *Apoorva Sudhakar*

Apoorva Sudhakar is an Independent Scholar based in Kerala. Her areas of interest include peace and conflict in Africa and South Asia. She has previously worked on the conflict over the Nile Dam and the abductions in Nigeria.

#### *Anu Maria Joseph*

Anu Maria Joseph is a Research Assistant at the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Her areas of interest include peace and conflict in Africa, Afro-European and Afro-China relations.

#### *Poulomi Mondal*

Poulomi Mondal is a postgraduate scholar at the South Asian Studies Centre at the Pondicherry University. Her interests include governance in the Sahel, Eastern and Central Africa, and issues related to maritime governance and non-traditional security.

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Editor: D. Suba Chandran

Assistant Editor: Anu Maria Joseph

