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Shifting from crisis response to resilience-building in the Horn of Africa

Centre for Pan-African Studies (CPAS) at SOAS & Shabaka Meeting Series – Conflict, Regional Stability, and Humanitarianism in Africa

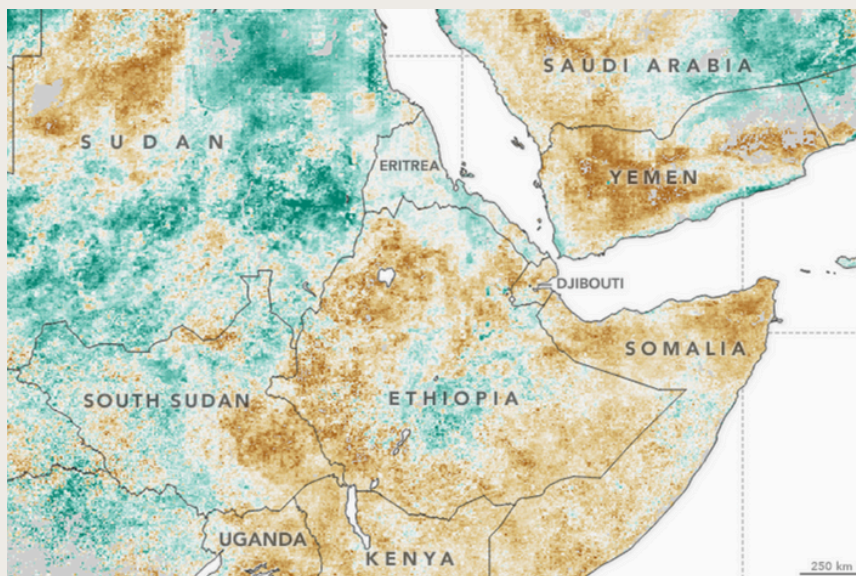


Image courtesy of NASA (2013)

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Executive Summary

In recent years, states in the Horn of Africa region have faced unprecedented humanitarian crises, marked by armed conflict, food insecurity, climate change, the loss of livelihoods, and political instability. While the region is no stranger to crises, recent events have seen these crises spill across borders, creating a complex web of interconnected challenges.

As of April 2024, an estimated 8.2m people are displaced both internally in Sudan and to neighbouring countries; 4.47m people are internally displaced in Somalia; 3.4m people are internally displaced in Ethiopia; and over 2.02m are internally displaced in South Sudan ([OCHA, 2024](#); [IOM, 2024a](#); [IOM, 2024b](#)). Food insecurity is again a growing threat to the region, with nearly 18m people at risk of acute hunger in Sudan and 16m people in Ethiopia facing food shortages ([WFP, 2024](#); [BBC 2024a](#)). In this regard, recent statements drawing attention to the risk of famine in Sudan and the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia are significant, including by the UN, USAID, and the UK FCDO ([Financial Times, 2024](#); [FCDO, 2024](#)).

Understanding the political economy of crises in the Horn of Africa is integral to achieving more sustainable crisis response in the region, including questions of state formation and capacity alongside the critical role played by local, national, and regional stakeholders in crisis response. International partners to states in the region must also deliver on Grand Bargain localisation commitments and transfer greater power and resources to national, and especially local, stakeholders involved in crisis response and long-term recovery, to help build resilience to future crises.

In response to increasingly complex threats and crises in the Horn of Africa, this policy brief advocates for a comprehensive, multi-pronged, and holistic approach to achieving sustainable peace and humanitarian outcomes, proposing recommendations for governments, civil society, and international humanitarian partners to achieve more sustainable responses to crises in the region.



Executive Summary

The recommendations outlined here are based on discussions from a closed round table meeting organised by the Centre for Pan-African Studies at SOAS, University of London, and Shabaka on 14 February 2024, attended by researchers and specialists on the Horn of Africa region, former African Union (AU) representatives, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and donors supporting crisis response, FCDO regional specialists, and diaspora humanitarians.



Key recommendations:

- **Deliver increased support for locally led initiatives**
- **Prioritise recovery and resilience-building**
- **Advocate for funding and decision-making policy frameworks inclusive of local communities**
- **Strengthening regional frameworks for inter-state and inter-sectoral cooperation**
- **Strengthen the integration of political, security, and humanitarian responses in the region**

Policy Context



As crises in the Horn of Africa often span the humanitarian–development (peace) nexus, both development and humanitarian policy frameworks are relevant to achieving more sustainable responses in the region. In the development sector, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing the Goals, both adopted in 2015, aim to realise ambitious development and poverty reduction gains by 2030 through 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets. These frameworks also inform states’ national development plans in the Horn of Africa, IGAD strategic regional objectives, and the continental AU Agenda 2063 (IGAD, 2020; AU, 2015).

In the humanitarian sector, the localisation agenda, Grand Bargain, and successor agreements emerged out of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul (IASC, 2022). In particular, the Grand Bargain included a target of allocating at least 25% of humanitarian resources to national and local partners by 2020, alongside strengthening transparency and accountability in humanitarian aid (*Ibid.*). This target has still not been met, and the proportion of humanitarian resources allocated to national and local civil society partners has reduced, from 5% in 2020 to 1.2% in 2022 (Development Initiatives, 2023).

Also relevant at the continental level are the AU’s Framework for the Peaceful Resolution of Conflict, Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), and the APSA. Adopted in 2002, the APSA is the framework for promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa, and is a useful model for engagement with other regions important to states in the Horn, particularly the Arabian Peninsula, the states of which currently lack comparable coherent regional frameworks, norms, principles, and institutional infrastructure. There is thus a need for deeper transcontinental Red Sea geostrategic collaboration that acknowledges the region’s geopolitical significance to global trade and food security within the Horn of Africa.

At the regional level, there are several policy frameworks that can support the shift from crisis response to resilience–building, including the 2012 IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework (RMPF), the 2014 Declaration of the IGAD Summit of Heads of State and Government on Progress of the Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI), the IGAD Conflict and Early Warning Mechanism (CEWARN) Strategy Framework 2012–2019, the IGAD Food Security and Nutrition Response Strategy 2020–2022, and the IGAD 2021–2025 Regional Strategy.

Understanding the political economy of crises in the Horn of Africa



In recent years, states in the Horn of Africa region have faced unprecedented humanitarian crises, marked by armed conflict, food insecurity, climate change, the loss of livelihoods, and political instability ([UNHCR, 2024](#); [WHO, 2024](#); [Kimutai et al., 2024](#); [Clapham, 2023](#)).

While the Horn of Africa is no stranger to crises, recent events have seen such crises spill across borders, creating a complex web of interconnected challenges. The evolving dynamics of the conflict ongoing in Ethiopia since 2016 and the outbreak of war in Sudan in April 2023 highlight the intricate nature of conflicts and humanitarian challenges in the region ([Clapham, 2023](#); [Markakis, 2021](#)).

The Horn of Africa's strategic location is crucial to shaping the trajectory of crises in the region. However, unlike in previous instances, when competition between Great Powers dominated inter-state relations, a new rivalry is unfolding involving "new", middle powers such as the Gulf states, Iran, and Turkey ([Marsai & Szalai, 2023](#); [Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021](#)).

This competition has heightened tensions and, in some instances, exacerbated humanitarian challenges. Moreover, the region serves as a hub for Red Sea trade, a crucial part of migration routes, and the source of the Nile waters. It is also in close proximity to Yemen and the unstable areas of the Sahel and central Africa.

Under these difficult conditions, governments and national and local civil society groups in the Horn and donors, international agencies, and INGOs are all confronted with the immense challenge of meeting the needs of people in the region. International efforts have been largely characterised by partial, reactive, and fragmented responses, resulting in only limited success mitigating crises.

Moreover, financing for humanitarian operations has failed to keep pace with rising needs, with donor commitments falling short of pledges to support crisis response across the region ([OCHA/FTS, 2024](#)).

Crises in the Horn of Africa present both old and new challenges, underpinning recent political developments in the region:



<p>Eritrea</p>	<p>Eritrea is consolidating itself as a security state capable of projecting military power in the region, providing training and military equipment in Somalia and deploying troops in the Tigray region of Ethiopia in support of the Ethiopian armed forces during the civil war (ADF, 2023; Marsai & Szalai, 2023).</p>
<p>Ethiopia</p>	<p>A traditional regional hegemon and, since 1991, an example of a successful “development state”, the splintering of national identity in Ethiopia has – for the government and humanitarian community – been a challenging source of conflict since 2016, when tensions between the centre and periphery took on inter-ethnic dimensions, culminating in the outbreak of conflict between the federal government and Tigray region from 2020–2022 (Clapham, 2023). The Ethiopian government was able to gain the upper hand in this conflict, in part due to external assistance from “new” regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Negash, 2023; Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021).</p>
<p>Somalia</p>	<p>Although the Somali government is slowly gaining greater stability and capacity, there has been increasing instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid as a government resource (Hailey et al., 2023; Rațiu, 2023). Despite its troubled history in recent decades, Somalia had been relatively calm until the recent dispute with Ethiopia over port access in Somaliland, which could potentially escalate (Webb, 2024; BBC, 2024b).</p>
<p>Sudan</p>	<p>Sudan is also undergoing a major crisis, which has already become regional in scope, with massive displacement both internally and to neighbouring states (IOM, 2024). The 2018 revolution in Sudan was a powerful example of “people power” in action, historic in the region (Gamal & Bachellerie, 2022; Malik, 2022). The revolution led to a hybrid negotiated arrangement between the old (military) and new (civilian), which could not sustain due, in part, to alliances between different military factions, traditional powers (such as Egypt), and “new” regional powers, such as the UAE (de Waal, 2023; Berridge et al., 2022). Critically, attempts led by Sudan’s international partners – including the EU, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and US – to negotiate a political settlement excluded key local civil society actors, who had warned of the risk of such negotiations legitimising the military (Ibid.)</p>

New and old international partners in the Horn



The interplay between states and international partners is an important dynamic in crises in the Horn of Africa. Such partners include not only “traditional” partners – such as the US, China, and Europe – and “old” regional powers, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but also increasingly relevant “new” regional powers, such as Iran, Qatar, Türkiye, and the UAE (Marsai & Szalai, 2023; Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021).

Gulf states, including the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, are attempting to craft a sphere of influence in the Horn of Africa (Negash, 2023). The UAE is increasingly positioning itself as a kingmaker in the region via its growing clientelist relationship with Ethiopia and support for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Leaders in the Horn of Africa have entered transactional relationships with these “new” players, who have shown themselves to be, in many ways, nimbler than their more “traditional” counterparts – such as China, the EU, UK, and US – in forging strategic partnerships around food security, land, markets, and resources in the Horn (Marsai & Szalai, 2023).

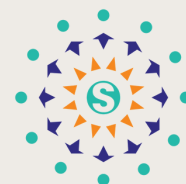
Yemen also remains a key player in the region, as the recent disruption of Red Sea shipping in response to the Gaza crisis demonstrates (Vreÿ & Blaine, 2024).

Regional, continental, intergovernmental, and international institutions tasked with helping to resolve/manage such issues between states, particularly the AU, IGAD, and the UN, have all deployed significant political and other resources to humanitarian response, peacekeeping, and development in the region (Walhad, 2023; Admassu, 2022; Rațiu, 2023).

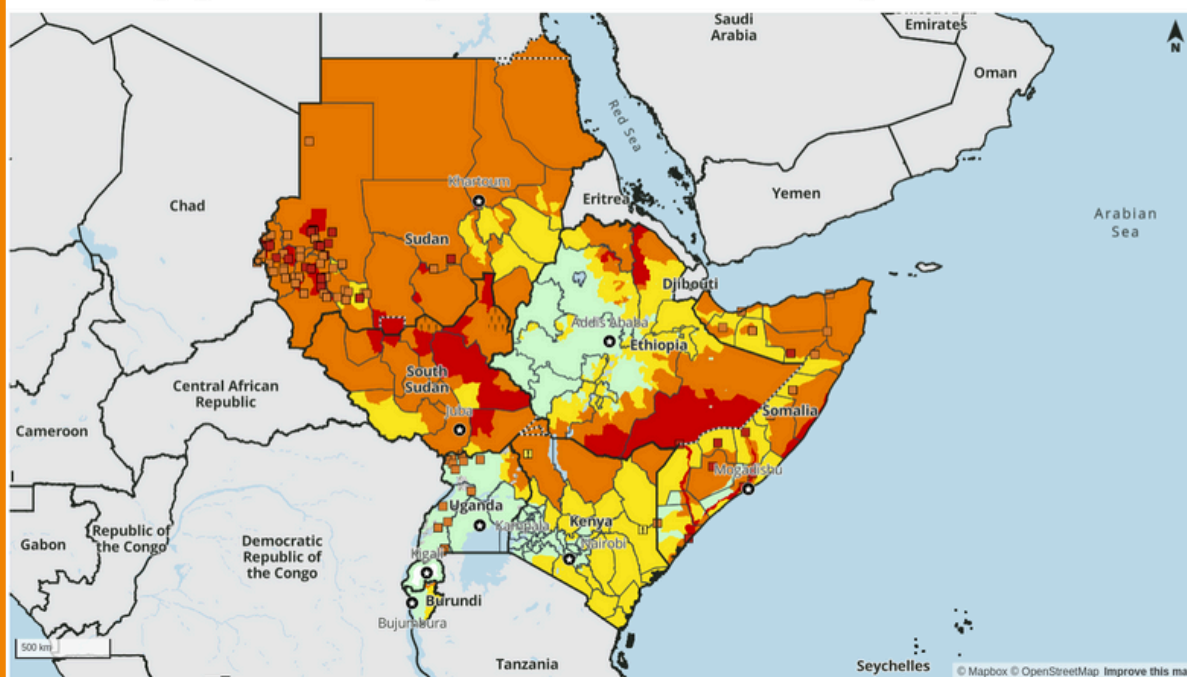
However, these institutions have become so overwhelmed by crises in both the Horn of Africa and neighbouring regions that they increasingly risk becoming irrelevant spectators (Apuuli, 2023).

There is a need to take a more integrated regional approach to addressing the impacts of these interlocking crises, and for more effective and sustainable responses in the Horn of Africa more broadly (Pillai & De Corral, 2022). Enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders, including IGAD and its member states, the Mediation Support Unit (MSU), and international partners, is essential to achieving these objectives (c.f. Bustamante & De Carvalho, 2020).

Challenges to humanitarian response in the Horn of Africa



East Africa projected food security outcomes, October 2023 - January 2024



IPC 3.1 ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY PHASE

Presence Countries

- 1: Minimal (Light Green)
- 2: Stressed (Yellow)
- 3: Crisis (Orange)
- 4: Emergency (Red)
- 5: Famine (Dark Red)

Remote Monitoring Countries

Highest IPC classification in areas of concern within the country

- 1: Minimal (Light Green)
- 2: Stressed (Yellow)
- 3+: Crisis or higher (Orange)

Symbols

- Settlement of displaced populations
- ! Would likely be at least one phase worse without current or planned humanitarian food assistance

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. FEWS NET's classifications are IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners. As of IPC 3.0, the IPC no longer assesses the impact of food assistance on classification and thus no longer maps the (!) However, FEWS NET continues to produce food security maps inclusive of the (!) as well as maps compatible with IPC 3.0/3.1, which include the mapping of food security assistance bags. FEWS NET and the IPC use different methods to estimate the total Population in Need of humanitarian food assistance and assess the risk of Famine. Learn more at www.fews.net/about.

Source: FEWS NET

As of April 2024, an estimated 8.2m people are displaced both internally in Sudan and to neighbouring countries; 4.47m people are internally displaced in Somalia; 3.4m people are internally displaced in Ethiopia; and over 2.02m are internally displaced in South Sudan (OCHA, 2024; IOM, 2024a; IOM, 2024b). Food insecurity is again a growing threat to the region, with nearly 18m people at risk of acute hunger in Sudan and 16m people facing food shortages in Ethiopia (WFP, 2024; BBC, 2024a).



Challenges to humanitarian response in the Horn of Africa

The prospect of hunger again stalking the region is a blow to states that have worked hard to build robust food security mechanisms, such as Ethiopia, following earlier experiences of famine in the 1980s ([WFP, 2023](#); [Mohamed, 2017](#)). In this regard, recent statements drawing attention to the risk of famine in Sudan and the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia are significant, including by the UN, USAID, and the UK FCDO ([Financial Times, 2024](#); [FCDO, 2024](#)).

However, despite the attention drawn to the risk of famine, countries in the Horn face a myriad of challenges, including economic instability, political instability, conflict, the impact of climate change and extreme weather events, food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and gaps in state capacity (see, inter alia, [UNHCR, 2024](#); [WHO, 2024](#); [Kimutai et al., 2024](#); [Clapham, 2023](#)). These drivers of crisis have a cumulative impact on states and their ability to respond to crises effectively. In addition, current and recent crises in the region have also highlighted the ongoing importance of critical infrastructure, particularly power, telephone/internet connectivity, and banking systems, to local livelihoods and sustained humanitarian responses ([Shabaka, 2024a](#); [REF, 2020](#)).



Humanitarian needs in the Horn of Africa are rising, increasingly outstripping available resources and humanitarian relief ([UN News, 2023](#); [UN OCHA/FTS, 2024](#)). Humanitarian financing gaps in the Horn have also increased in recent years, with only Kenya and Somalia achieving 80% funding for humanitarian response plans since 2020. This is consistent with a global trend of growing humanitarian financing gaps ([OCHA/FTS, 2024](#)). Growing pressure on Global North aid budgets also means increased scrutiny by politicians and electorates ([Al Jazeera, 2023](#)). Donors can often find additional resources when there is sufficient media attention, but such has arguably been lacking for the Horn of Africa relative to crises in other regions, especially in the context of so-called “donor fatigue” ([IRC, 2023](#)).



Homegrown capacities and solutions – the critical role of locally led interventions

In the face of the political, security, and humanitarian challenges encountered by states in the Horn, it is also important to focus on successes in the region, not only failures.

For example, the Ethiopian state remains largely functional: only some areas of the country are not adequately governed and the situation does not presage state collapse ([Bereketeb, 2023](#); [Ylönen, 2023](#)). Similarly, contrary to narratives of crisis in the region, other states – such as Uganda and Kenya – are showing relative stability.

Local civil society and communities affected by crises in Horn states – such as in Sudan, Somalia, and Somaliland – have also effectively supported humanitarian access for international partners ([Shabaka, 2023c](#); [Njeri, 2019](#)).

This underscores the need to centre locally led, conflict-sensitive, homegrown solutions to regional challenges for any solutions to be sustainable ([Gamal & Bouchellerie, 2022](#); [de Waal et al., 2020](#)). Addressing these challenges requires mechanisms – and political will – that enable civil society to propose and lead such local solutions.

There is a growing disconnect between the critical role played by local civil society and faith groups (and their diaspora partners) in crisis response in the Horn and international partners' support for local actors.

Local communities and civil society are often first responders to crises, yet their role is not adequately recognised or supported by national, regional, and international aid and governance structures ([Metcalf-Hough et al., 2023](#); [Shabaka, 2023b](#)).

Supporting locally led aid, in collaboration with international actors, is the most effective approach for the region ([CSF, 2023](#); [Fast & Bennett, 2020](#)).



Homegrown capacities and solutions – the critical role of locally led interventions

Progress remains limited on delivering key Grand Bargain localisation commitments, creating a trust deficit in the region ([Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2023](#)). Many INGOs active in crisis response in the region acknowledge the importance of supporting local and national civil society partners and are working to provide such, but donor requirements and restrictions also tie their hands in this regard (IRC, 2019). Indeed, local civil society groups in the region are often forced to rely on local and diaspora philanthropy to support their humanitarian activities ([Shabaka, 2024c](#); [Kleist & Abdi, 2022](#)).

Additionally, diaspora organisations, networks, and communities know their home areas well and invest on a sustained basis, from crisis response to recovery ([HPG, 2019](#); [Hammond et al., 2011](#)). Diaspora remittances are highly adaptive in times of crisis, and remittance flows already outstrip bilateral aid and foreign direct investment (FDI) to the region ([EU DiF, 2021](#); [Ratha et al., 2023](#)).

There is thus a need for high-level advocacy to make global policy frameworks on counter-terrorism funding and money laundering more responsive to the needs of national, local, and diaspora organisations involved in crisis response, as well as reduce bureaucracy and transaction costs for sending money to the region ([IOM/FCDO, 2023](#)).²

Donors and institutional humanitarian partners should treat local civil society and communities as more equal partners in crisis response, sharing risks more equitably and investing in strengthening capacities in terms of documentation, reporting, and accountability ([Shabaka, 2023b](#); [Christian Aid et al., 2019](#)).

This does not mean “reinventing the wheel”, however, as there are plenty of digital and other tools available that can support and monitor humanitarian response by local actors; for example, by using common mobile messaging apps, as has been piloted by some INGOs and local and diaspora partners in Sudan ([Shabaka, 2024b](#); [NRC, 2023](#)).



[2] Remittance transfers to some countries in the Horn of Africa are not simple. Even before the current crisis in Sudan, it was virtually impossible to send money directly to the country from the Global North; instead, the diaspora often sent money via Dubai or other Gulf States ([Shabaka, 2023a](#))

Conclusions and Solutions



The overlapping political, economic, environmental, humanitarian, and development challenges facing the Horn of Africa require more sustainable partnerships and effective leadership from states, intergovernmental bodies, and national and local stakeholders. International actors must ask how they can more effectively engage with national and local stakeholders in the Horn of Africa, especially local communities, as they are the ones with local knowledge, networks, and often expertise.

In addition, we must shift from firefighting to building resilience to future crises in regional, national, and local institutions and communities.

In response to increasingly complex threats and crises in the Horn of Africa, this policy brief advocates for a comprehensive, multi-pronged, and holistic approach to achieving sustainable peace and humanitarian outcomes.

Firstly, proactive international engagement is crucial to strengthening regional frameworks for inter-state and inter-sectoral cooperation to stabilise the region. This involves supporting the revitalisation of IGAD as a platform to foster trust among member states and align international priorities more closely with regional ones. Collaboration among key stakeholders, including IGAD and its member states, APSA, the [MSU](#), and international partners, is essential to achieving these objectives.

Secondly, the region's international partners should prioritise supporting funding and decision-making policy frameworks that are inclusive of local communities and their partners in the diaspora, in line with existing policy commitments. This entails redirecting humanitarian funding towards grassroots initiatives and providing direct support to local civil society and affected communities. It also requires policies that promote collaborative, locally led partnerships and focus interventions on addressing local needs and priorities. Moreover, the diaspora plays pivotal roles as both active participants and agenda-setters in the region's politics, and their influence and contributions should be recognised.

Thirdly, international stakeholders should recognise the importance of comprehensive transcontinental Red Sea collaboration, acknowledging the region's geopolitical significance to global trade and food security within the Horn of Africa. This collaboration would create a trans-regional security community that surpasses transactional engagement. Collaboration with IGAD countries to combat piracy, smuggling, and other security threats in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden is crucial to ensuring global trade and the stability of the region.

Recommendations



This policy brief makes the following recommendations for achieving more sustainable responses to crises in the Horn of Africa.

International humanitarian partners and donors to the region should:

1. Deliver increased support to locally led initiatives

- Move humanitarian funding towards the grassroots: invest in national and especially local capacity and infrastructure to strengthen local organisations and governments' skills and resources to promote more sustainable crisis response and build long-term resilience to future crises. This requires greater burden and risk-sharing by international partners and donors to ensure resources reach those most in need.
- Focus interventions on local needs and priorities: ensure that all interventions are informed by participatory planning processes and community-led assessments, which help create ownership and recovery efforts aligned with local needs and priorities.

Governments in the region, regional and continental organisations (such as IGAD and the AU), and international humanitarian partners should:

2. Prioritise recovery and resilience-building

- Invest in long-term collaborations between funders, humanitarian partners, and local communities. Co-create sustainable solutions that address immediate needs, build long-term resilience, and help prevent future crises in the region.
- Enhance forecasting and prevention systems: invest in forecasting and early warning systems in the Horn of Africa that work with local communities and civil society to identify potential environmental, humanitarian, and security challenges before crises strike.
- Break down siloed approaches and acknowledge that communities are not passive aid recipients: they possess vital resources, knowledge, and resilience. Celebrate and amplify success stories from the region as valuable contributors to recovery and resilience-building, in addition to crisis-response efforts.

Recommendations



3. Advocate for inclusive funding and decision-making policy frameworks for local communities

- Develop policies that promote collaborative, locally led partnerships: global advocacy is needed for policies that incentivise international humanitarian and development partners and governments to actively collaborate with local NGOs, community leaders, and traditional authorities.
- Enable greater decision-making by civil society and local communities in the Horn: support the development and implementation of policies that prioritise and include local voices and perspectives in all stages of crisis response and recovery.
- Recognise and address power imbalances: actively address existing power imbalances between international actors, national governments, and local communities. This ensures that local voices are not simply co-opted or marginalised, but genuinely empowered to shape decisions that impact their lives.

4. Strengthen the integration of political, security, and humanitarian responses in the region

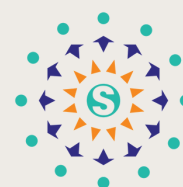
- Integrate political, security, and humanitarian responses, working with a wider range of international, national, and especially local stakeholders, including affected communities. Diplomatic processes in the region often legitimise conflict actors while excluding local civil society and communities for being too “political”.
- Support the revitalisation of international, regional, and continental frameworks and institutions for inter-state and inter-sectoral cooperation to stabilise the region, including IGAD, APSA, and the MSU, which all have a vital role to play in brokering political resolutions to crises in the region.
- Build mechanisms – and political will – that enable national and local stakeholders (governments, civil society, and local communities) to propose and lead local solutions, as well as to improve sharing of information, best practices, and resources.
- Foster comprehensive transcontinental Red Sea-Gulf collaboration, in particular with states such as Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen, acknowledging the region’s geopolitical significance in global trade and food security within the Horn of Africa.
- Enhance collaboration with IGAD countries to combat piracy, smuggling, and other security threats in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to ensure global trade and regional stability.

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- [sg1] I've changed these to a and b, make sure the right ones are cited throughout text.
- [sg2] Same as above

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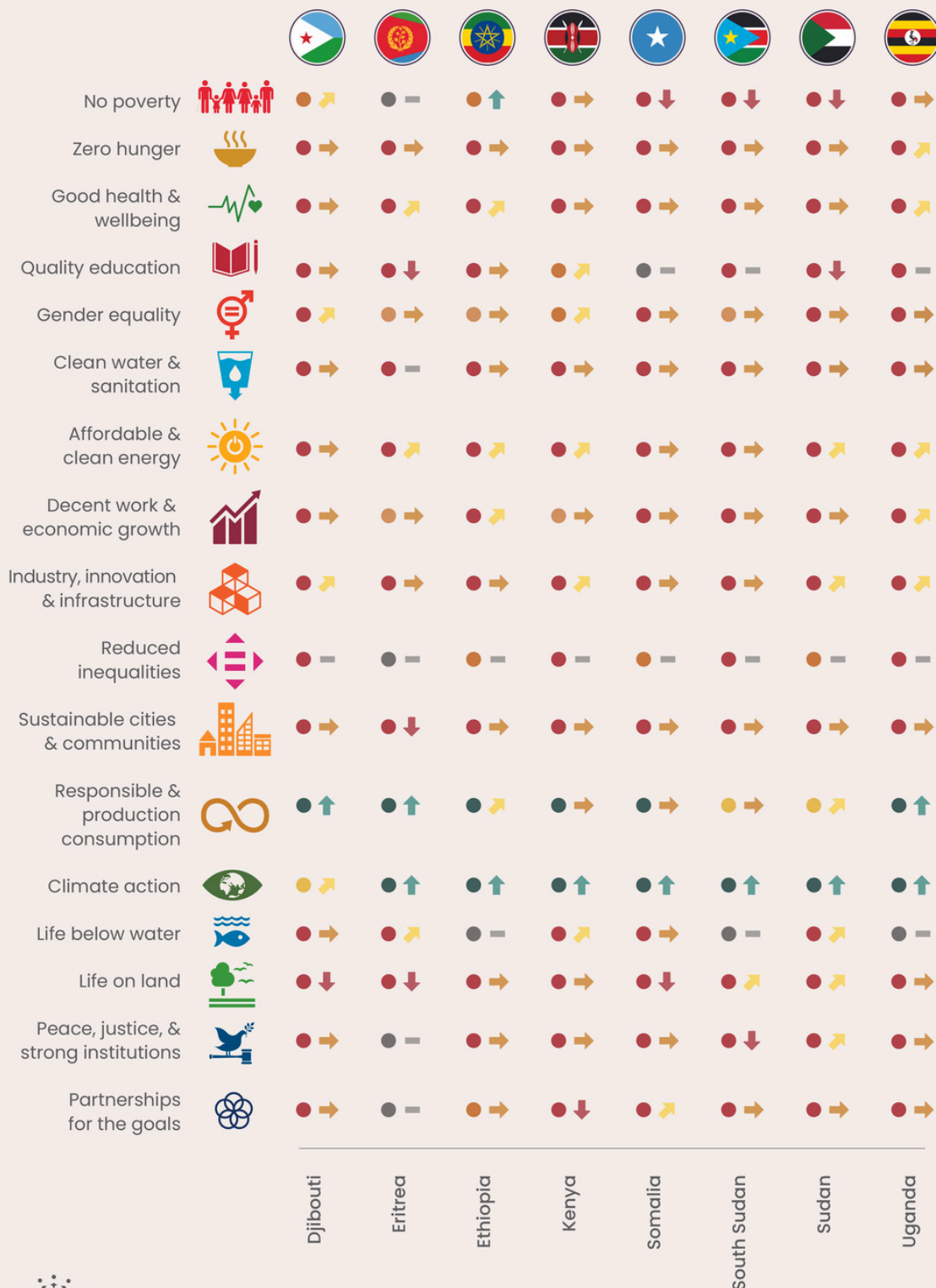




PROGRESS AGAINST SDGS IN IGAD MEMBER STATES IN 2022

● SDG Achievement ● Challenges remain ● Significant challenges remain ● Major challenges remain ● Data not available

↑ On track ↗ Moderately increasing → Stagnating ↓ Decreasing — Data not available



About



CPAS

The Centre for Pan-African Studies (CPAS) is a platform for promoting interdisciplinary research, policy dialogue, and public engagement on issues related to the African continent and its diaspora.

CPAS is based at the Department of Politics and International Studies. The Centre facilitates the development of new and ongoing joint research projects, publications, seminars, and collaborations with scholars, civil society actors, and institutions in Africa, the UK, and beyond.



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SHABAKA

Shabaka is a diaspora-led organisation focused on the role of diaspora and migrants in humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery.

Shabaka specialises in research, policy, and practice, contributing to knowledge on the role of diasporas and migrants in humanitarian action. We provide information and insights to local, national, and international actors on how diaspora communities back local actors' first response to humanitarian crisis and the transition to longer term development.



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