

KENYA DROUGHT

Marsabit & Turkana Alert | January 2023

Context & Rationale

The Horn of Africa is experiencing its longest and worst drought in 40 years following four consecutive failed rainy seasons.¹ The arid and semi arid lands (ASAL) counties of Kenya are facing particularly severe consequences of persistent drought including loss of livestock, deteriorating livestock body condition, failed harvests, lack of access to water, livelihood collapse and extremely high levels of food insecurity. According to the July-September 2022 Integrated Phase Classification acute food insecurity (IPC AFI) analysis² covering the lean season, about 3.5 million people (24% of the ASAL population) are in need of food assistance, i.e. IPC Phase 3 or above, and 785,000 people are in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency).

Conditions are most concerning in Marsabit and Turkana Counties, where elevated malnutrition and mortality rates have surpassed catastrophic thresholds. While Turkana and Marsabit were classified in IPC Phase 3 following the July 2022 IPC analysis,² FEWS NET's compatible analysis in the food security outlook in October 2022 indicated that both counties were in fact already in Phase 4³—a situation where more than 20% of households have large food consumption gaps, which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality.

According to the July 2022 IPC acute malnutrition (AMN) analysis,⁴ malnutrition levels were extremely critical in Turkana North and Turkana South subcounties in Turkana and Laisamis subcounty in Marsabit (classified to be in IPC AMN Phase 5). For the pockets of populations already

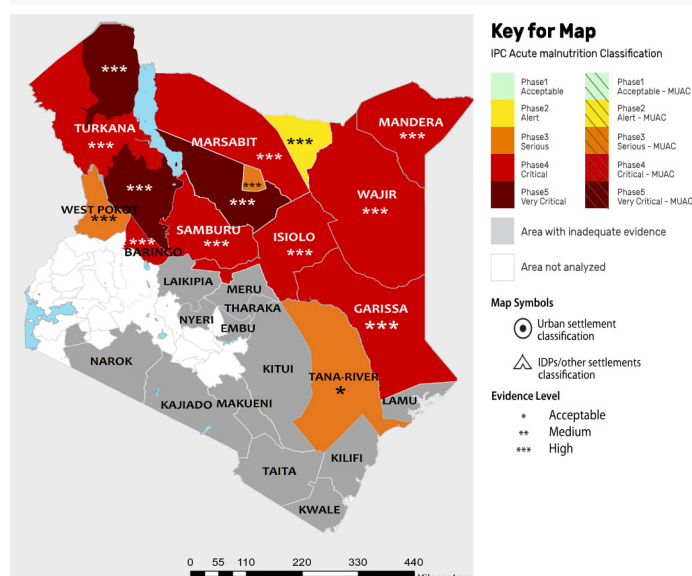
facing emergency and critical malnutrition, following yet another failed rainy season, **these counties may deteriorate further and display catastrophic food security and nutrition outcomes** (IPC AFI Phase 5).

Following these concerning findings, REACH conducted an impact of drought assessment in Marsabit and Turkana counties towards the end of the lean season in November 2022.⁵ Findings suggest that there is an **extremely high proportion (over 70% having poor or borderline FCS) of households in both counties experiencing moderate to severe food consumption gaps** and adopting severe consumption-based and livelihood-based strategies to mitigate these gaps.

KEY FINDINGS

- **89% and 84%** of households in Turkana and Marsabit counties, respectively, employed severe livelihood coping strategies. Out of households who had livestock pre-drought and those who do or don't own livestock now, 19% in Marsabit and 33% in Turkana used or exhausted this strategy.
- **81% and 71%** of households in Turkana and Marsabit counties, respectively, were found to have poor or borderline food consumption scores (FCS) in the seven days prior to data collection. This indicates that households are in dire need of food assistance - IPC AFI Phase 3 or 4.

IPC acute malnutrition classification July 2022⁴



Turkana and Marsabit counties are facing extreme levels of acute malnutrition

- The July 2022 IPC analysis found malnutrition levels to be extremely critical in Turkana and Marsabit counties. In particular, Turkana North, and Turkana South (Turkana) and Laisamis sub-county in Marsabit were found to be in IPC AMN phase 5. This implies that despite the current levels of humanitarian assistance, more than 30% of children below the age of five years are acutely malnourished.
- The proportion of malnourished children in Turkana and Marsabit has likely increased due to the worsening food security situation characterized by low milk availability, unfavorable terms of trade, increasing food prices and water stress, which is expected to continue during the dry weather.⁶

Populations in Turkana and Marsabit counties are experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity

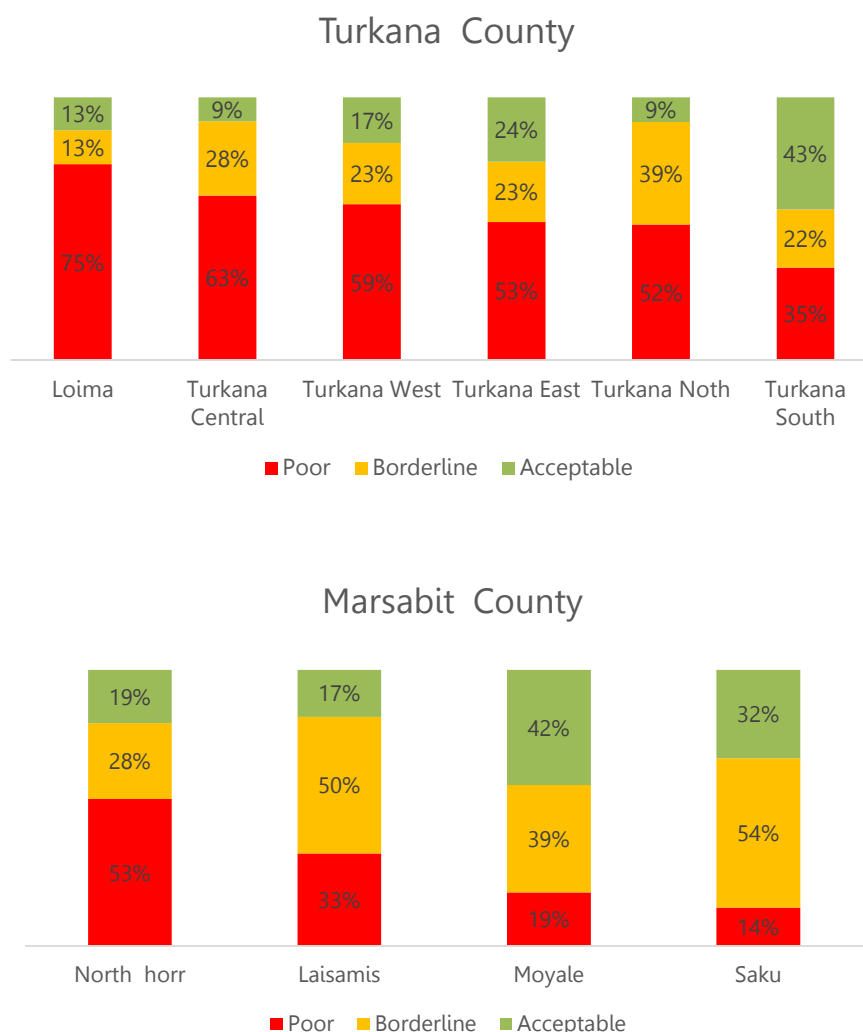
The prolonged drought is compounding existing food insecurity among populations in both pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood zones in Marsabit and Turkana counties. As a result, inter-sectoral needs for these populations are spiking due to near exhaustion of livelihoods, resource and coping mechanisms as well as inflation and lack of basic services. **The population in these two counties are therefore in dire need of humanitarian assistance (food, health and nutrition and water).**

- The July 2022 IPC analysis classified Marsabit and Turkana counties to be in IPC AFI phase 3. About half of households in these areas were found to have food consumption gaps that were reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition, and households were

marginally able to meet minimum food needs, only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.²

- The IPC analysis also projected that the two counties would slip into Phase 4 between October 2022 and January 2023. This has likely happened since findings from the impact of drought assessment conducted in November 2022⁵ found that 57% and 29% of households in Turkana and Marsabit, respectively, had a poor FCS in the seven days prior to data collection. The situation was particularly alarming in Turkana where more than half of households in each sub-county except Turkana South were found to have a poor FCS. This indicates that households were consuming unbalanced, non-diversified and unhealthy diet in the seven days prior to data collection, which points to IPC Phase 3 or above.

% of households per FCS category per sub-county:



The prolonged drought, lack of water, and food is forcing already vulnerable populations in Turkana and Marsabit into deeper crisis

The prolonged drought conditions have depleted water sources, resulting in high water insecurity, and a rapid deterioration in conditions for the majority of the population relying on farming and livestock production in Marsabit and Turkana counties. It is evident that communities in both counties have struggled with water access issues for the four failed rainy seasons and are more susceptible to poor nutrition outcomes and diseases, including for women due to an increased burden of water collection.

- Based on the impact of drought assessment conducted by REACH in November 2022, **access to clean water was reported as a major challenge for about half of the households in Marsabit (53%) and Turkana (45%).** This led to conflict among a minority of the community members (about 5% in both counties). Additionally, women face the burden of traveling long distances in search of food and water sources, exposing them to the risk of violence and conflict.⁸
- Saku (68%) and Loima (71%) sub-counties were found to have a higher proportion of households, compared to other sub-counties in Marsabit and Turkana, experiencing water insecurity in the 30 days prior to data collection. When households lack access to adequate water they cannot get enough to drink, and observe proper hygiene, hence exposing them to the likelihood of contracting water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera.
- The prolonged drought and exceptionally hotter-than-normal conditions have resulted in rapid deterioration of subsistence crop farming. Prior to the prolonged drought, in 2019, about a quarter of households in Saku, Marsabit county and Turkana South, Turkana county reportedly relied on crop farming as their main source of income. However, only 17% and 3% of households in Turkana South and Saku, respectively, currently rely on crop farming as a source of income. This is likely because November is the end of the lean season in addition to the ongoing drought.

All ASAL counties reported that the price of commodities, especially food items, was above the long-term average. The high prices of maize, beans, milk and other products was attributed to inflation and below long-term average harvest because of the failed rainy seasons. The quarter two joint market monitoring conducted in 15 ASAL counties in June 2022, found that the prices of most of the food items including maize and maize flour increased compared to quarter one.

In addition, vendors reportedly experienced both a high

cost of transportation and shortage of supply for both food and non-food items, which reduced access to basic items and further drove up the price of commodities. Since food was found to make 69% and 51% of the expenditure shares in Turkana and Marsabit Counties, respectively, households will increasingly face challenges in securing diverse and sufficient amounts of food without engaging in increasingly severe coping strategies.

Community fetching water in Galasa Noth Horr- Marsabit county



Conclusion

- Lifesaving humanitarian assistance** to meet basic food needs, accompanied by health and nutrition interventions, is key to prevent further deterioration of food security and loss of life.
- Given the high levels of malnutrition, **increasing malnutrition identification and treatment programs**, to increase the scope and frequency of mass screening is likely to enhance recovery from, as well as prevention of, malnutrition.
- Increased access to an adequate quantity of safe water** is critical to help prevent waterborne diseases as well as conflict among community members.
- Scale-up of livelihoods support** to repair depleted livelihoods, particularly in remote rural areas, is likely to improve access to livelihoods and save lives. This includes supporting weak livestock with supplementary feeding and subsistence farming with quality and drought-tolerant inputs.
- Continue monitoring and surveillance of the impact of drought** in Marsabit and Turkana counties, especially in the sub-counties of Laisamis, Turkana North and Turkana South, as well as in other ASAL counties.

ENDNOTES

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¹ [Horn of Africa faces another failed rainy season according to the UN, Africa news, September 2022.](#)

² [IPC analysis portal, July 2022.](#)

³ [FEWSNET food security outlook, October 2022.](#)

⁴ [IPC acute malnutrition analysis July 2022.](#)

⁵ Impact of drought assessment in Marsabit and Turkana, November 2022-link to be added after data is validated and published

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⁶ [NDMA long rains assessment, July 2022²](#)

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⁷ [Joint market monitoring initiative, Q2, Kenya](#)

⁸ [Water related conflict in Turkana county report, July 2022.](#)

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

LOCATION MAP

