

Climate change and health

Engaging with communities in Somalia



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Climate
Centre



Norwegian Red Cross



Why we should talk about climate change and health

Climate change is affecting our health today.

- Our planet is warming rapidly due to greenhouse gas emissions from human activities (e.g. the burning of fossil fuels). Climate change is linked to extreme weather events, water and food insecurity, poor air quality and more.
- Climate change impacts our health in numerous ways. It increases the frequency of communicable diseases such as dengue, malaria, cholera and diarrhoeal disease; of non-communicable diseases, like asthma and strokes; and of mental health conditions and trauma from extreme weather events, including heatwaves, floods and droughts.
- Climate change disrupts health systems by increasing the frequency of extreme weather events that damage healthcare infrastructure, cause power cuts and disrupt or break down cold chains. Therefore, it is important to maintain essential healthcare services close to populations that are in the most vulnerable situations.
- You can make a difference by talking about climate change in your communities. You have a unique role in helping your communities understand the impacts of climate change on health and how to protect themselves.



How to communicate on climate change and health with communities¹

Before you start talking, consider your audience and goal.

Who are you speaking to? It could be community members, policy-makers, friends and family or social media followers. What is your goal? It might be to empower, raise awareness, convince, inform or encourage.

Keep your message simple and focus on human health.

Simple messages are often the most effective. Presenting climate change as a health issue helps your audience see climate change as a local, tangible problem that they are facing right now.

Tell stories to connect with people.

People often find it hard to connect to statistics and facts, while they easily connect to stories. If you have personal experience observing the health impacts of climate change, share the story with the community (e.g. “In 2015, we had the worst floods in history. We saw a sharp rise in diarrhoea and malaria cases ...”).

Empower people to make good decisions about their health and community.

Let people know how they can protect themselves and their communities from the health impacts of climate change.

Vulnerable populations

The health risks posed by climate change can vary both between and within regions and communities, contributing to health inequalities. While everyone is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, certain groups are more vulnerable than others.

Which populations are particularly vulnerable?

- elderly people
- infants and children
- women, especially pregnant women
- people with pre-existing health conditions
- people with disabilities
- people in low-lying and coastal areas
- people with lower socio-economic status or those living in unsafe housing
- small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishing communities
- people who work outdoors in hot climates

Key messages

Climate-sensitive disease:

Vectorborne disease

- Climate change is amplifying the threat of vectorborne disease in Somalia, where malaria and dengue are among the main diseases transmitted by vectors.
- Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall and changes in land use are increasing the likelihood of infections.
- Protect yourself and your family by consistently using insecticide-treated nets, eliminating standing water around your home (because it serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes), regularly cleaning water storage containers and minimizing the presence of waste around your house. Seek early treatment if you experience symptoms like fever, headaches or body aches. Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) volunteers and staff can provide guidance and referrals to essential health and protection services.

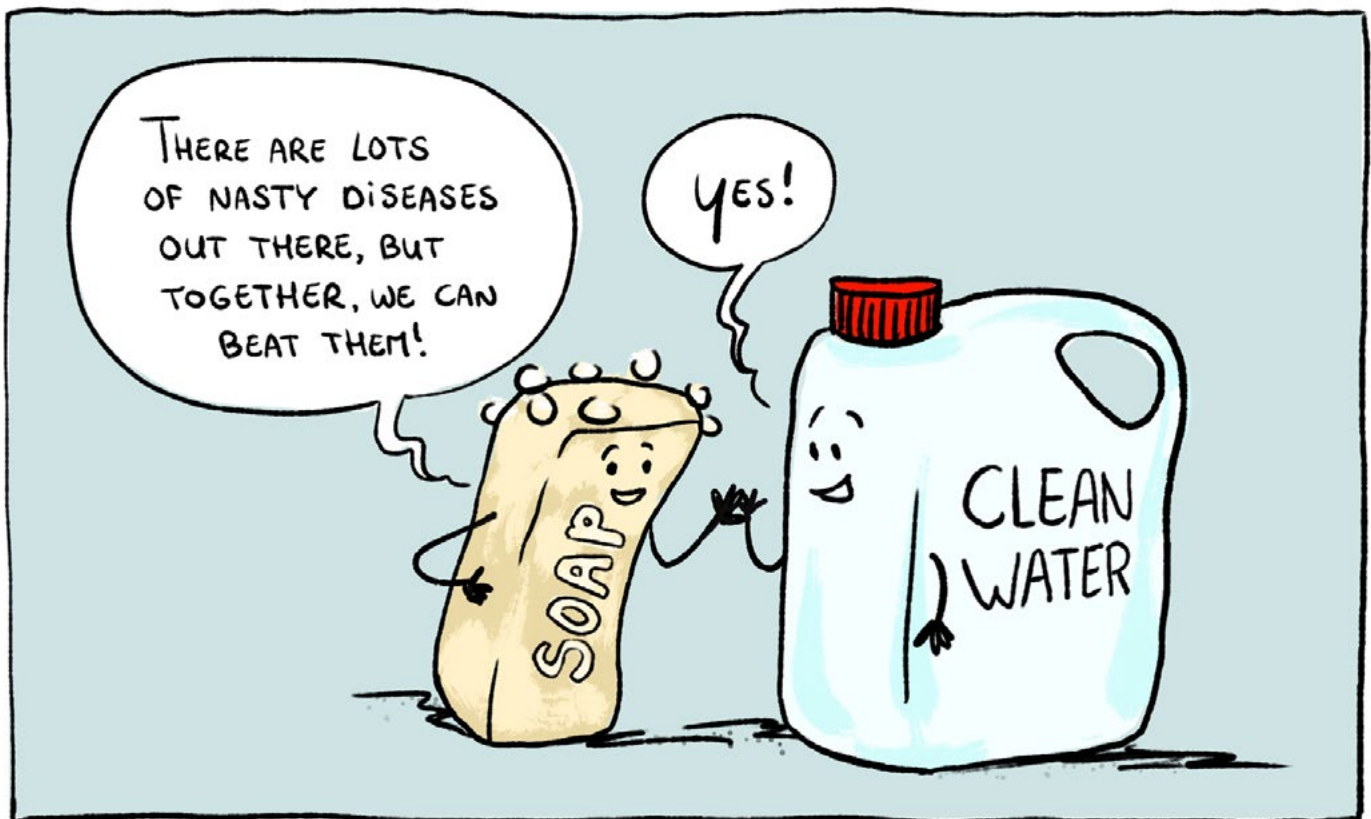
PROTECT YOURSELF



Waterborne disease

- Climate change is making waterborne disease an even bigger threat in Somalia, where outbreaks of illnesses like cholera, diarrhoea and typhoid have been frequent and remain a constant danger. Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall and droughts followed by sudden floods create the perfect conditions for these diseases to spread. Limited access to clean water and proper sanitation makes many people – especially women and children – more vulnerable.
- As a community, we can take steps to protect ourselves by consistently washing hands with soap and clean water – especially after using the toilet and when handling food; boiling or treating drinking water; using safe sanitation methods such as toilets or latrines; and storing drinking water in covered containers. Preparing for the impacts of climate change is essential to reduce risks of waterborne disease and keep communities safe and healthy.

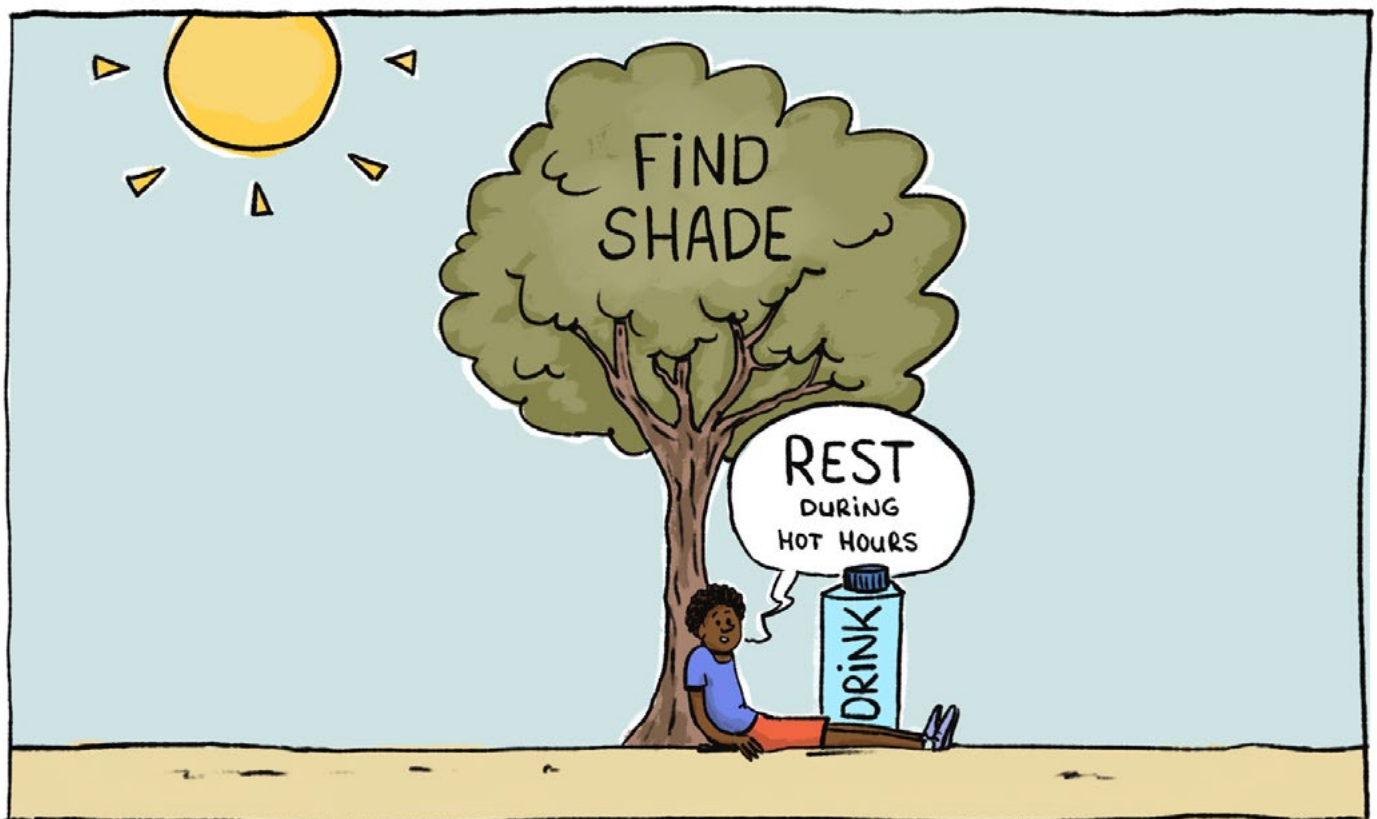
PRACTISE HYGIENE



Extreme heat:

- Temperatures are rising steadily across Somalia because of climate change, and it is expected to get even hotter in the years ahead. By 2030, temperatures are expected to increase by 1.4–1.9°C, with this increase reaching up to 2.3°C by 2050, and possibly climbing as high as 3.4°C by 2080. While coastal areas might feel it a bit less, central Somalia will face the worst of the heat ([Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and adelphi, 2022](#)). We'll also see more extremely hot days, with temperatures above 35°C becoming more common, making heatwaves a bigger threat. This puts many people at risk, especially those who lack the means to stay cool and safe. If this pattern continues, heat-related illnesses and deaths will increase.
- We need to act now to protect our communities from this rising heat. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated and, when possible, avoid outdoor work or activities during the peak midday heat. Consider shading your home by covering windows with drapes, and watch out for symptoms of heat-related illness such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

STAY COOL



Extra messages

Mental health conditions:

- When homes are damaged and crops destroyed because of extreme weather events like floods and droughts, it can cause stress, anxiety and hopelessness – especially when families face food shortages, displacement or loss of income. Prolonged heat exposure can also make people feel tired and irritable. As extreme weather events like flooding and droughts will continue to increase in Somalia because of climate change, this will have an important effect on our mental health.
- Understanding and acknowledging the emotional and psychological toll of extreme weather events helps us to be proactive in protecting our mental health and supporting those around us.
- Seek professional help early for mental health concerns to get the right support you need, by reaching out to SRCS (Somali Red Crescent Society) volunteers and staff, who can provide guidance and referrals to essential health and protection services.

Food insecurity and malnutrition:

- Climate change is greatly affecting our lives, with more frequent droughts and floods making it harder to grow crops, raise livestock and stay in our homes. In recent years, prolonged droughts (e.g. 2020–2023) and heavy floods have challenged our way of life, causing food shortages and forcing families to move in search of better conditions. These hardships have led to hunger and malnutrition, especially among children and vulnerable people.
- We have the strength to adapt and protect ourselves as a community by finding solutions like planting drought-resistant crops, storing food and water during good seasons, looking out for each other and seeking early support from health centres when needed.

Population movement:

- Climate change is a major driver of population movement within Somalia and across borders, particularly among pastoralist and agricultural communities. This can lead to limited access to healthcare during migration and heightened risks of gender-based violence, malnutrition and communicable disease.
- When faced with these challenges, seek support from SRCS (Somali Red Crescent Society) volunteers and staff, who can provide guidance and referrals to essential health and protection services.