



## Statement by the Inter-Agency Working Group, East and Central Africa

International Women's Day, 8 March 2026

### The drought–conflict reality for women and girls in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia

International Women's Day (IWD) 2026 calls for **"Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls."** ([United Nations](#)). In Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, these words resonate in contexts where drought and conflict collide - driving displacement, hunger, and protection risks while stretching already fragile services for women and girls. As the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG), we issue this joint call to recognise and respond to the compounded realities facing women and girls across these crises.

Across these contexts, women and girls are living in a polycrisis of conflict, climate shocks, disease risks, and a tightening funding environment. In this convergence of crises, women continue to exert agency and leadership, including as first responders. However, women and girls carry the hidden costs: walking longer distances in search of water and food, shouldering increased caregiving despite scarcity of resources, facing disrupted schooling, and confronting heightened risks of exploitation and violence. This reflects a broader pattern in humanitarian emergencies, where children and especially girls and children with disabilities, bear a disproportionate burden when families are pushed to the edge. We recognise women's agency and leadership including as first responders.

The severity of this crisis is reflected in the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) data. An estimated 6.5 million people in Somalia are now experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity—IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse)—between February and March 2026 (doubled since early 2025). Approximately 1.84 million cases of children under-5 will likely suffer from acute malnutrition in 2026, including 483,000 children who are likely to be severely malnourished and at risk of death. Drivers of food insecurity are poor rainfall, conflict and insecurity displacement, high food prices and significantly reduced humanitarian aid.

In South Sudan, approximately 5.97 million people face IPC Phase 3+, with 1.3 million in Phase 4 and persistent famine risk in worst-affected areas. In Sudan, over 19.2 million people are projected to face IPC Phase 3+, with some populations already in Catastrophe (Phase 5). These figures are not abstract - they represent households forced into impossible decisions. When food insecurity reaches such levels, women often skip meals so children can eat, girls are withdrawn from school, early and forced marriage rises as a survival strategy, and access to health and protection services diminishes.

### Hope and transformation

*In Somalia, Asha, a mother displaced by flooding, watched her children fall ill when she could not afford treatment. Through World Vision's mobile health and nutrition services, her children received care and recovered - restoring hope and dignity amid displacement. Her story reflects what is possible when humanitarian action reaches women and girls in time.*

*In Sudan's ongoing conflict, women and girls are carrying extraordinary burdens, more than we can imagine, yet they continue to be a source of strength, care and resilience for everyone around them. 'Give to Gain' is a powerful reminder that by supporting their psychosocial wellbeing, we all benefit. When women and girls receive the safe spaces, healing and support they deserve, we all gain - stronger families, more resilient communities and a future built on dignity and hope.* Lobaba Noureldaim, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Coordinator (MHPSS), Save the Children Sudan

On International Women's Day, we call on the broader international community to scale-up collective efforts towards the following, on the ground: rights protected through essential services, justice pursued through equitable access, and action delivered before crisis becomes catastrophe.

### **Joint recommendations from the IAWG to donors, governments and UN agencies**

In solidarity with women and girls affected by conflict and climate shocks, we call for flexible, multi-year and coordinated funding, ensuring gender-responsive humanitarian action:

- 1. Recognise protection of women and girls as lifesaving.**  
Fully fund Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response, Women and Girls Friendly Spaces, and survivor-centred clinical care and services across all sectors, ensuring accessibility and inclusion of all women and girls, and including safe referral pathways and relevant information.
- 2. Safeguard girls' education in emergencies.**  
Provide predictable, multi-year financing to keep girls learning, through accessible temporary learning spaces, assistive devices, teaching methods, and removal of financial, physical, and attitudinal barriers.
- 3. Scale up integrated food, nutrition and health services, and improve WASH facilities.**  
Prioritise pregnant and lactating women, infants and young children, ensuring services are accessible, staff are fully trained, and outreach reaches those unable to travel to service points. Ensure the availability of safe, reliable and accessible potable water and sanitation facilities.
- 4. Invest in women's economic recovery and dignified livelihoods - leaving no one behind.**  
Expand cash assistance, savings groups, and climate-smart livelihoods that are accessible to women with disabilities and caregivers, reducing harmful coping mechanisms and supporting dignified recovery.
- 5. Fund locally led, women- and disability-centred responses.**  
Resource women-led organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and community protection mechanisms; strengthen accountability systems so assistance is safe, inclusive, and responsive to diverse needs.
- 6. Protect humanitarian access and uphold inclusive protection standards.**  
Support safe corridors, uphold international humanitarian law, and ensure assistance reaches women and girls, older women, and other groups at heightened risk of exclusion.

International Women's Day is not only a commemoration - it is a decision point. Together, as the Inter-Agency Working Group, we call for urgent, collective action to ensure that women and girls in drought- and conflict-affected settings are not only protected today but empowered to recover and lead tomorrow.

The Inter-Agency Working Group is a consortium of NGOs with regional presence and programmes across Eastern and Central Africa working to strengthen humanitarian and sustainable development outcomes across the region, through enhanced coordination, advocacy, technical expertise and active challenging of the broader aid community.

Members include ACTIONAID, ADRA, ALIMA, CAFOD, CARE, CESVI, CONCERN, COOPI, CRS, DRC, GOAL, HELP LOGISTICS, HI, IRC, ISLAMIC RELIEF, MAFI, MERCY CORPS, NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE, NRC, OXFAM, PLAN, RELIEF INTERNATIONAL, SAVE THE CHILDREN, SOS CVI, STREET CHILD, TEARFUND, WAR CHILD, WHH, WVI and ZOA