



Preparing for Drought Before It Arrives

Early Action in Harshin, Ethiopia, June 2026

72 stakeholders trained / 5 communities reached / behaviour change observed

At a Glance

In Harshin Woreda, in Ethiopia's Somali region, communities are already preparing for a drought that has not yet arrived.

Seasonal forecasts for the 2026 Karan rain season (July-September) point to a worrying trend: **rainfall is expected to be near or below normal levels**, putting water availability, crops and livestock at risk. For pastoralist families, whose livelihoods depend on fragile natural resources, even a shortfall in rain can quickly escalate into a crisis.

Rather than waiting for that moment, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society has triggered its **Drought Early Action Plan** in Harshin, so people receive the right information early enough to take action and reduce drought impacts.

This activation is part of the [**Water at the Heart of Climate Action**](#) initiative, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Turning forecasts into action

In early June 2026, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society brought together 72 stakeholders from across Harshin, from local meteorological and disaster management authorities to health workers, community representatives and volunteers, to translate complex seasonal forecasts into practical early warning advisory, helping communities prepare earlier through stronger local early warning systems.

Experts from the Ethiopian Meteorological Institute explained what the upcoming season could look like, outlining the potential impacts for Harshin: water shortages, reduced pasture, declining crop yields and increased pressure on livestock.

To actively mitigate these risks head-on, participants agreed on an early warning information flow, from regional authorities down to districts (woredas), communities (kebeles), and ultimately to individual households. This ensured that the messages would not remain at institutional level, but reach the people who need them most:

Early Warning Dissemination Flow: Harshin



Measures to mitigate drought impacts:

Water management - Collect early rain - Store safely - Keep water clean - Avoid unsafe water	Food & nutrition - Prioritise vulnerable groups - Reduce waste - Use drought crops - Seek support early	Farming - Delay planting - Use resilient seeds - Limit farmland expansion - Save seeds	Livestock - Move to pasture - Monitor health - Store feed - Vaccinate animals	Health & hygiene - Wash hands regularly - Use latrines - Prevent heat stress - Seek medical care when needed
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Reaching communities, one step at a time: activity implementation

After the training, Ethiopian Red Cross Society volunteers were deployed to five Kebeles across Harshin: Qudhac-Ramale, Arar-Arey, Farah Liban, Lafo-Islamood and Dabaylka.

Carrying official early warning messages and advisory notes issued by local disaster management authorities, the volunteers worked with community committees to ensure that the information was shared widely and consistently. The process followed formal structures in the shape of letters, meetings, and local coordination, so that

alerts were recognized as both credible and urgent.

Monitoring visits confirmed that information was not only dispatched but also passed further down: from community leaders to sub-communities, and from there to households, including those in more remote pastoralist areas across all five Kebeles. This ensured that vulnerable households received timely information and were encouraged to take preparedness actions.

When information leads to change: key observations and community response

What stood out during these visits was the positive response and engagement. Community members engaged actively with the early warning guidance, discussing risks and sharing advice among themselves, demonstrating increased awareness of preparedness measures.

In several locations, this led to a noticeable

shift in behaviour around the management of water reservoirs. Traditionally, many reservoir owners keep the inlets closed during the first rains to avoid the entry of debris and contaminants. However, due to the anticipated drought conditions and the advisory messages received, communities recognized the importance of maximizing water harvesting opportunities from the

onset of rainfall. Community members reported that, following the dissemination of the early warning message, owners were encouraged to open their reservoirs to collect the first rainfall.

This demonstrates that the early warning

messages were understood and translated into practical preparedness actions by the communities, maximising storage while water is still available. It is a small but significant adjustment, showing how early warning messages can translate directly into preparedness on the ground.



Ethiopian Red Cross Society volunteers are being deployed to their respective kebeles to disseminate early warnings and advisory, June 2026. © Desmond Ongara / Netherlands Red Cross

Blending scientific and traditional knowledge: hearing from community voices

For many in Harshin, forecasts are not new. But trust in them is built over time and often reinforced through local knowledge.

Hassan Abdilahi, a pastoralist from Arar-Arey, explains how communities interpret the situation. Alongside scientific forecasts, people rely on indigenous forecasting methods such as the Norish calendar. This year, the Norish calendar indicates a drought year, which is in alignment with current meteorological forecasts predicting below- to near-normal rainfall during the Karan season. Considering both scientific and traditional forecasts pointing toward drought likelihood, Hassan Abdilahi is already adapting his livelihood strategy: selling some livestock

while they are still healthy, investing in feed and water, preparing to move animals if needed, and avoiding water waste. At the same time, he shares information with others in his community.

Mohammed Hassan, a pastoralist from Kudaramale, owns an agricultural plot with livestock. He compares early warning messages to being informed about a dangerous situation: when people know a risk is coming, they take steps to protect themselves. For Mohammed Hassan, early warnings are always useful: when shared widely, they encourage communities to stay alert, prepare, and act early.

Conclusion: acting early to reduce impact

Across the five targeted communities, households are now taking practical steps to prepare themselves: from collecting rainwater, planting drought-resilient crops and seeds, protecting livestock, and practicing smart hygiene. While these actions may seem small individually, together they represent a shift from reacting to crisis to anticipating and reducing risk.

The situation in Harshin remains uncertain. Forecasts continue to evolve, and reaching remote communities remains a challenge. Close coordination between meteorological

services, government authorities, and humanitarian actors will be essential in the coming months. Yet the early signs are promising.

The activation of the Early Action Plan has shown that when communities receive timely, trusted information, and when that information is communicated through familiar systems, they are both willing and able to act. In a context where drought can have devastating, long-term consequences, that early action can make all the difference.

Credit: Desmond Ongara, Netherlands Red Cross in Ethiopia

Want to know more?

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Climate risks are rising fast and **millions remain unprotected**. WHCA offers a proven, scalable model to bring early warnings to the communities that need them most.



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