

## SOMALIA

## WATER NEWSLETTER

2017



As the saying goes “when the well is dry, they know the worth of water”. In Somalia, they don’t have to wait until wells dry up to know it. In a country heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock, the reliance on consistent rainy seasons has traditionally marked the destinies of Somali men, women and children. When climatic shocks affect the regularity and timeliness of the water cycles, lives are inexorably affected: too little of it crops will die and herds will be decimated; too much of it and we’ll see much of the same. Somalis have traditionally managed to cater for these fluctuations but after almost three decades of relentless armed conflict and violence, coping mechanisms have been weakened whilst the infrastructure which previously helped to store and distribute water in times of drought or channel it in times of floods has been largely destroyed or rendered inoperative.

The ICRC tries to alleviate some of the effects of erratic weather patterns compounded by the prolonged conflict and violence. The severe drought stemming from a series of consecutive failed rainy seasons, which peaked in 2017, has fueled a humanitarian crisis of a phenomenal scale, as livelihoods have been swept away, food availability dramatically diminished and millions of people have been displaced from their homes. National and regional authorities, donors and humanitarian partners have mobilized in a collective effort to try to respond to this crisis: the ICRC, together with the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), has been at the forefront of this response. In an integrated response including health, nutrition and emergency assistance interventions, the activities carried out by our Water and Habitat teams have been key. Hygiene promotion campaigns, treating water sources, installing pumps, drilling and repairing boreholes, constructing water harvest structures or improving and increasing water

storage and distribution capacities have helped limit the impact of this severe drought to **over 1.2 million** people.

If droughts nurture humanitarian crises so do floods: in Somalia both phenomena ironically traditionally coexist and if 2017 witnessed severe water scarcity, the closing months of 2016 saw important floods in parts of the country. This was the case of the town of Beletweyene where **70,000** people were affected by the overflowing of the Shebelle River, a lifeline to the region which at times, such as this one, can also be the culprit of large scale disruption and hardship. In parallel to the emergency assistance to those affected, a key priority for the ICRC and SRCS teams was to avoid the spread of water-borne diseases thus focusing efforts in guaranteeing the availability of clean, potable water.

Not all the work, however, has centered in responding to natural disasters compounded by man-made crises. As you will discover in these pages, the ICRC in Somalia wears two hats: an emergency response one, but also a livelihood and resilience strengthening one. The latter aims to improve sustainable and longer term water storage and distribution infrastructure, promote irrigation schemes in support of better agricultural practices, rehabilitate canals and river embankments, repair and construct social infrastructure such as clinics and hospitals.

Behind each humanitarian crisis there are millions of individual tragedies endured by people who, even when the wells are full, know what water’s worth, and as such value and look after it as the most precious of assets.

**Daniel Gerard O-Malley**

Deputy Head of ICRC Delegation for Somalia

# RAISING AWARENESS TO SAVE LIVES

In Somalia, hundreds of cholera deaths have been reported in recent years. These cases can be attributed at least in part to the lack of water and sewage infrastructure following two decades of civil war. In the Dalhiis displacement camp in Kismayo for instance, heavy rains have resulted in a number of outbreaks, including diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid.

Raqiya Abdi\*, a mother of five, lives in the Dalhiis camp. The exterior of her tiny hut is a patchwork of torn sacks and used newspaper. An open drain runs past her simple home and a mound of garbage lies in front. When the heavy rains started, she worried that her home would be destroyed, but instead it brought an even worse challenge: contaminated water infected her two sons with cholera. Raqiya's husband was working in Jowhar, over 450 km from Kismayo, so was unable to help.

Luckily, a truck driver offered her transport to Kismayo General Hospital, where her sons received treatment

## INSPIRED FOR CHANGE

The recovery of her two sons and the repeated outbreaks of this disease in her community inspired Raqiya to educate and mobilise other residents in the camp to raise awareness about the dangers of cholera. She received training from the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), and now she volunteers as a peer educator each week to help inform others in the camp on the importance of maintaining a hygienic environment.

"If I had known the importance of washing hands properly and boiling water before using it, I could have told a different story today; it was a lack of understanding that caused this," she explains.

"You have to clean your environment. You have to clean your latrines with enough water, then ensure you wash your hands. This way we will have a healthy life and we might not be infected with cholera," Raqiya informs the women attending the training session.

We assist victims of conflict and disaster by improving their access to clean and safe water.





Raqiya demonstrates using a poster to raise awareness of hygiene issues.

## INTERVENTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the SRCS have trained 65 people living in Kismayo with the aim of raising awareness about the dangers of cholera and steps that should be followed to prevent further spread of this disease.

Nick Rowe, who is supporting hygiene programmes for the ICRC in Somalia, says it is encouraging to find communities taking the lead in raising awareness about the dangers of cholera.

“Cholera is endemic in Somalia, and it can be very difficult for people to get treatment for cholera and other waterborne diseases,” he explains. “By helping communities understand how to prevent cholera infection, the number of people infected can be greatly reduced. However, to eradicate the disease people need access to safe water and proper sanitation facilities.

Without these, outbreaks will continue to strike and take lives.”

Symptoms of cholera can begin as soon as a few hours or as long as five days after infection. Often, symptoms are mild, but about one in 20 people infected have severe watery diarrhoea accompanied by vomiting, which can quickly lead to dangerous levels of dehydration. Although many infected people may have minimal or no symptoms, they can still spread the disease, especially where sanitation facilities are few.

The ICRC supports the SRCS with materials and training on hygiene, and today Raqiya is using the lessons she acquired to educate others to help prevent further cholera outbreaks. Simple hygiene tips were also sent via text message (SMS) to 29,591 residents this year to help prevent further outbreak of waterborne diseases.

\* Not her real name

# BAGS OF WATER FEED A FAMILY AFTER PUMP IS RESTORED

Bakhdaad Abdi\*, a Somali mother, fills her blue jerrycan with water at a water point recently rehabilitated by the ICRC. The restored pump has allowed her to open a novel business: selling plastic bags full of water to truck drivers on a busy road in western Somalia.

“I make \$1 a day. I know it is not that much but it means a lot to me. I use this small amount to meet the needs of my two kids,” said Bakhdaad, a 38-year-old who is her family’s main breadwinner.



Bakhdaad Abdi packs the water bags ready to sell in Dhusamareb, Somalia.

## THREE KILOMETERS VS. 200 METRES

Bakhdaad walks 200 meters to the water point to fetch water for her family and business. She passes by a kiosk to buy charcoal then heads home, where she heats the water in a local hand-made pot. She lets the water cool for 10 minutes and then pours it into plastic bags.

She then walks three kilometres with a cooler full of bags of water to reach the main road. There she stands

under the unforgiving sun waiting for truck drivers to pass by on the Dusamareb– Guriel highway.

“I sell them at 2,000 Somali shillings each and sell almost 20 a day, which comes to about \$2. It is enough for me as it can take care of my two kids,” she says.

Bakhdaad fled Mogadishu after the civil war in 1992 and moved to Dusamareb. Her husband was the backbone of the family before he became seriously ill two years ago, forcing Bakhdaad to rise up and take care of the family.

“I used to be a tea girl. I would sell tea to local herders but later abandoned it after I realized it doesn’t pay well,” she said.

From the tiny opening of her hut in Qoqob village where Bakhdaad lives, one can see a caravan of camels and donkeys racing past, toward the water point. Dusamareb town is known for its pastoralist inhabitants. The town has just a few buildings with patches of open prayer grounds where herders converge and pray for rain during the dry season.

The conflict in Somalia has lasted more than two decades, and old water points have been left in a state of disrepair or ruin as a result of age and neglect. Most of the community here depends solely on livestock as a means of sustenance, unlike Bakhdaad who chose to try a different field.

The ICRC rehabilitated a water source for the village of Qoqob, assisting the nearly 10,000 people living there. The borehole is managed by the community. According to Alexandre Farine, who coordinates water projects for the ICRC in Somalia, water is an urgent concern for herders given the harsh environment they live in.

“We realized the capacity for the tank was not enough for the pastoral community and the animals who rely on this borehole. That’s why we had to put a tank that can hold a larger volume of water,” explains Alexandre.

\*Not her real name

# TEXT MESSAGES SENT TO BOOST CHOLERA PREVENTION EFFORT

It's a text message that could save a life: "Wash your hands with soap and tell your children to do so." The ICRC for the first time sent life-saving mobile phone messages to more than 20,000 people in Somalia to quickly pass on cholera prevention tips.

The informative messages encouraging better hygiene practices are being sent to residents after the April outbreak of cholera in south-central Somalia.

"Since then more than 1,000 people have died following the outbreak of cholera in Lower Jubba region," said Maurizio Campailla, health program coordinator for the ICRC in Somalia. "We want to send a message directly to communities made vulnerable by years of conflict, the harsh climatic environment and displacement to avoid additional trauma and death."

Since the beginning of April, health officials from the ICRC and Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) have treated 1,000 cholera cases a week in Lower Jubba. The ICRC and SRCS have also been broadcasting daily cholera prevention messages on radio stations since early May.

Some areas in Somalia are currently experiencing flooding, exposing those communities to cholera and other water-borne diseases. In Beletweyn, families living in the numerous displacement camps recently had



Rita Nyaga/ICRC

A message from ICRC to encourage better hygiene practice.

to flee rising water levels. The ICRC and SRCS continue to respond to the emerging humanitarian needs there by providing medical consultations and drugs. Food rations have been distributed to the most vulnerable. Some 850 women-headed households in Beletweyn were among those that received the cholera text messages.

Flooding in the town of Beletweyne.



Agen Janjane/ICRC

# THE DROUGHT CONVERSATION

Six years after a disastrous drought killed more than a quarter million people in Somalia, the country finds itself in the grips of yet another disturbingly familiar situation. Again, conflict and prolonged drought have combined to leave 6.2 million Somalis, more than half the country's population, in need of urgent humanitarian help. With the threat of famine looming and the trend worryingly similar to the 2011 crisis, humanitarian actors including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continue to mobilize efforts to avert a similar outcome. Emergency food has been distributed to families, including the displaced to help them cope. Cash was also given to families in areas with functional markets. Water, precious in such times, poses another threat as drought-hit families resort to using untreated sources. With valuable help from volunteers of the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), hygiene promotion campaigns are carried out in addition to the distribution of chlorine tablets. These efforts help communities better cope with the challenges posed by unsafe water supplies.



## HALF THE POPULATION

Don't have access to safe water owing to insecurity, poor infrastructure and the limited number of service providers



27,677  
PERSONS

benefitted from the improvement and deepening of 38 wells



286,890  
PERSONS

regained access to safe drinking water through construction and rehabilitation of 52 boreholes

## WHAT WE SAID



“ We must move quickly to avert disaster  
-Jordi Raich  
Head of ICRC in Somalia



“ Famine is Looming over countries in Africa and the Middle East, places like #SouthSudan, #Somalia, #Nigeria and #Yemen  
-Peter Maurer  
President of the ICRC



“ Racing against time!  
As famine is still looming over #Somalia, the worst can be prevented if we act fast.  
-Dominik Stillhart  
ICRC Director of Operations



## HOW IT HAPPENED

April

July

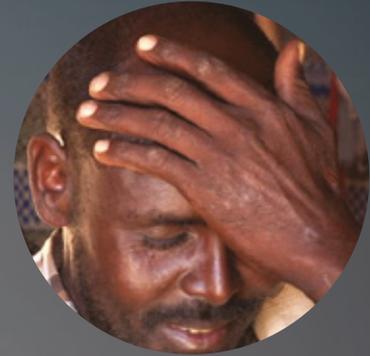
October

Gu Rains

Hagaa

The dry spell that began as a season of failed rains in 2015 has stretched through 2016. Livestock and crops are among the hardest hit, with the lack of pasture and water threatening the livelihoods of millions. The rains expected between April and June have been below average. Once again farmers are waiting for the rains to arrive. Will the rains, if any, be enough to break the vicious dry spell?

# WHAT THEY SAID



“ I don't know what my children will eat. It's really bad for your sanity.



“ In all my 43 years, I haven't seen a drought this bad.



“ We'll struggle. If God gives us rain, alhamdulillah! We are just waiting for rain.



**526,439**  
PERSONS

benefitted from access to safe and clean water through the distribution of water purification tablets along with hygiene promotion campaigns



**18,362**  
PERSONS

with their livestock benefitted from installation of 50 temporary open storage facilities and animal troughs

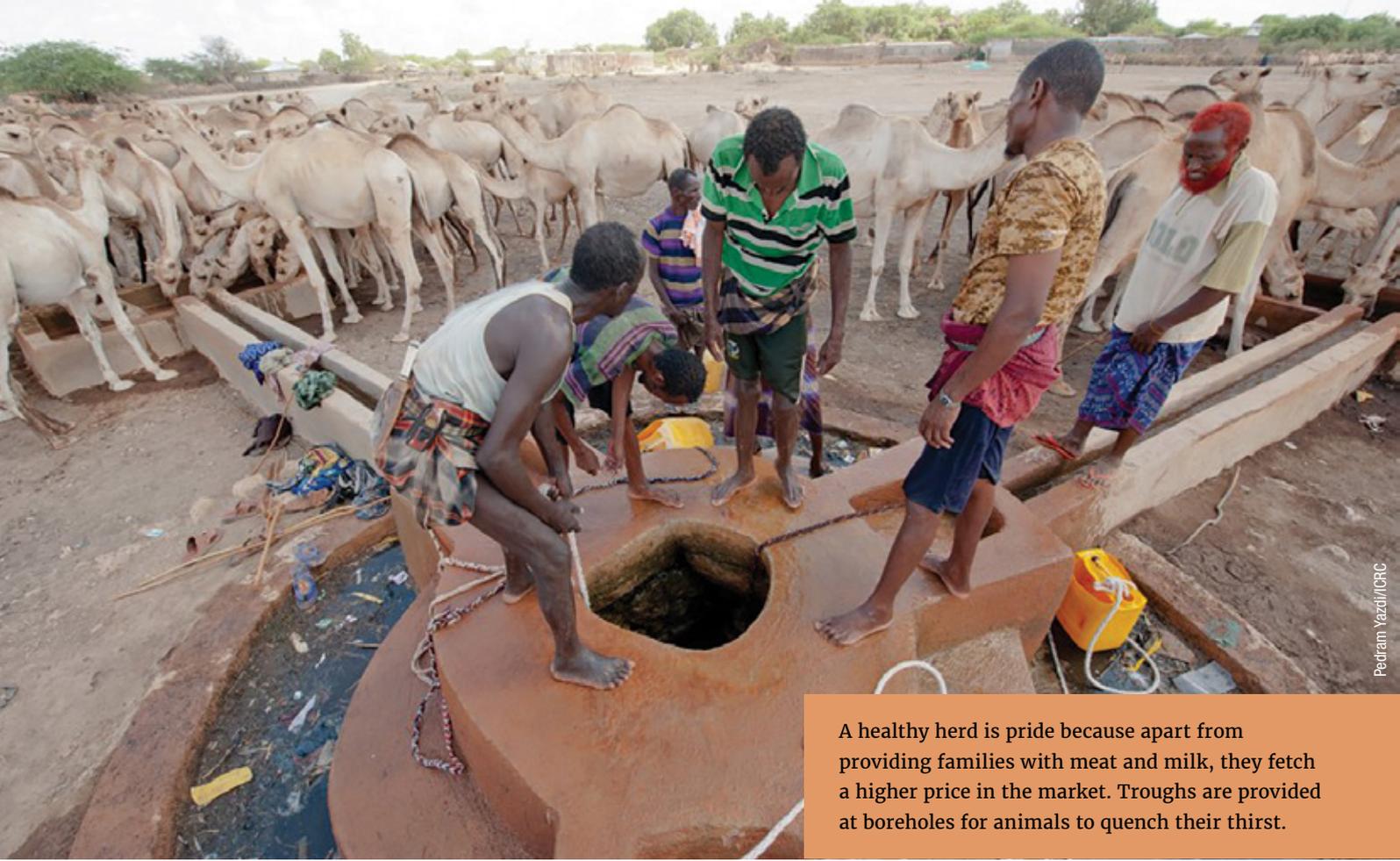


**Deyr Rains**

**Jilaal Dry Season**

rough to 2017, killing more livestock and crops as each month passed. Pastoral farmers that depend on tending the pastoral lifestyle most Somalis are accustomed to. Halfway through 2017, the Gu rains families are caught up in the harsh waiting game that is fast becoming the norm as they hope the next 1?

**ICRC**

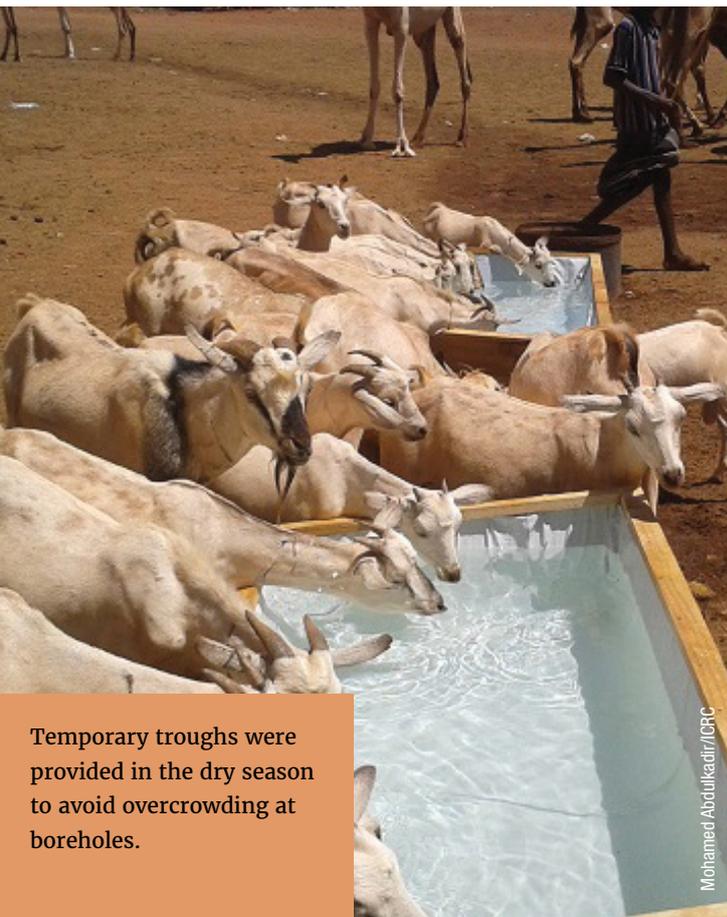


Pedram Yazji/ICRC

A healthy herd is pride because apart from providing families with meat and milk, they fetch a higher price in the market. Troughs are provided at boreholes for animals to quench their thirst.

# WATER IN PICTURES

Water is a precious resource for the Somali community, which largely depends on livestock and farming for their livelihoods. These photos showcase activities that the ICRC carries out across Somalia.



Mohamed Abdulkadir/ICRC

Temporary troughs were provided in the dry season to avoid overcrowding at boreholes.



Mohamud Miraj/ICRC

Water kiosks like this one in Qardho that is run and maintained by the community is one way we help them access safe and clean water.



Cheerful children in Somalia take turns drinking from a freshly installed tap.

Pedram Yazdaji/ICRC



Farmers receive agricultural advice and seeds to plant from the ICRC. In 2016, 30 boreholes and wells were dug and 27 water catchment projects were completed.

Pedram Yazdaji/ICRC



Security and erratic weather patterns such as drought and floods force communities to relocate frequently. The ICRC repairs waterpoints, boreholes and wells to ensure these communities have a continued supply of water.

Pedram Yazdaji/ICRC

# WATER RESPONSE IN NUMBERS

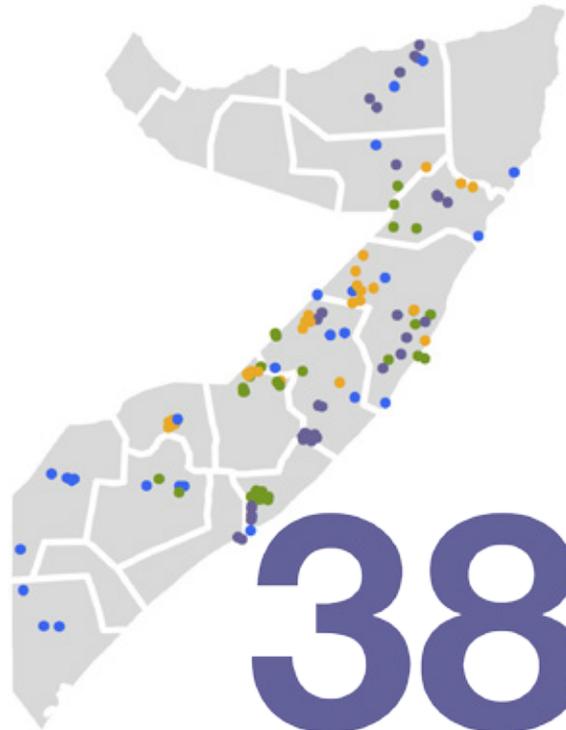
JANUARY - DECEMBER 2017

Years of conflict and climatic shocks like drought have disrupted access to safe and clean water in Somalia. We improve access through digging boreholes, wells and rehabilitating water systems. We also provide water to people displaced by conflicts and floods. In collaboration with the SRCS, we support households with water purification materials and information on how to treat water for domestic use. In flood prone areas we reinforce river banks with sandbags to prevent flooding.

# 52



The number of boreholes constructed and rehabilitated. More than 286,000 people were able to regain access to safe drinking water.



# 38



The number of wells improved and deepened to increase access to safe water. More than 27,000 people benefitted.

# 46



The number of rainwater harvesting structures constructed. More than 290,000 people benefitted.

# 50



Open storage tanks with a capacity of 5,000 litres along with animal troughs installed. More than 18,000 people and their livestock benefitted.

# 30,000 PEOPLE RECEIVE FOOD AND SAFE DRINKING WATER AFTER FLOODING

Flooding in Beletweyne displaced tens of thousands of people 2016, leaving them in need of food and safe drinking water. The ICRC and the SRCS distributed emergency assistance to more than 30,000 people to alleviate the effects of the flood.

The ICRC and SRCS carried out a five-day distribution of rice, oil, beans and mosquito nets.

“This flooding was the worst in years. It covered most of the town and surroundings. As the people move to higher grounds, they needed everything. The ICRC provided food and other basic items, clean water and health care to the most affected communities. This enabled them to hold on as they started to rebuild their homes,” said Albert Jabre, who is ICRC’s field coordinator for the area.

Approximately 100,000 aquatabs were distributed with each family receiving 20 tablets, enough to last them for one month. One tablet can purify 20 litres of drinking water.

The flood was a result of heavy rains in the upper part of the Ethiopian highlands that caused river Shabelle to overflow. Shafi Ibrahim, a local elder, said the flood waters destroyed crops and fields remain inaccessible.

“The flood destroyed almost everything. The majority of the community here operates a small business in a



Floods in Beletweyne town.

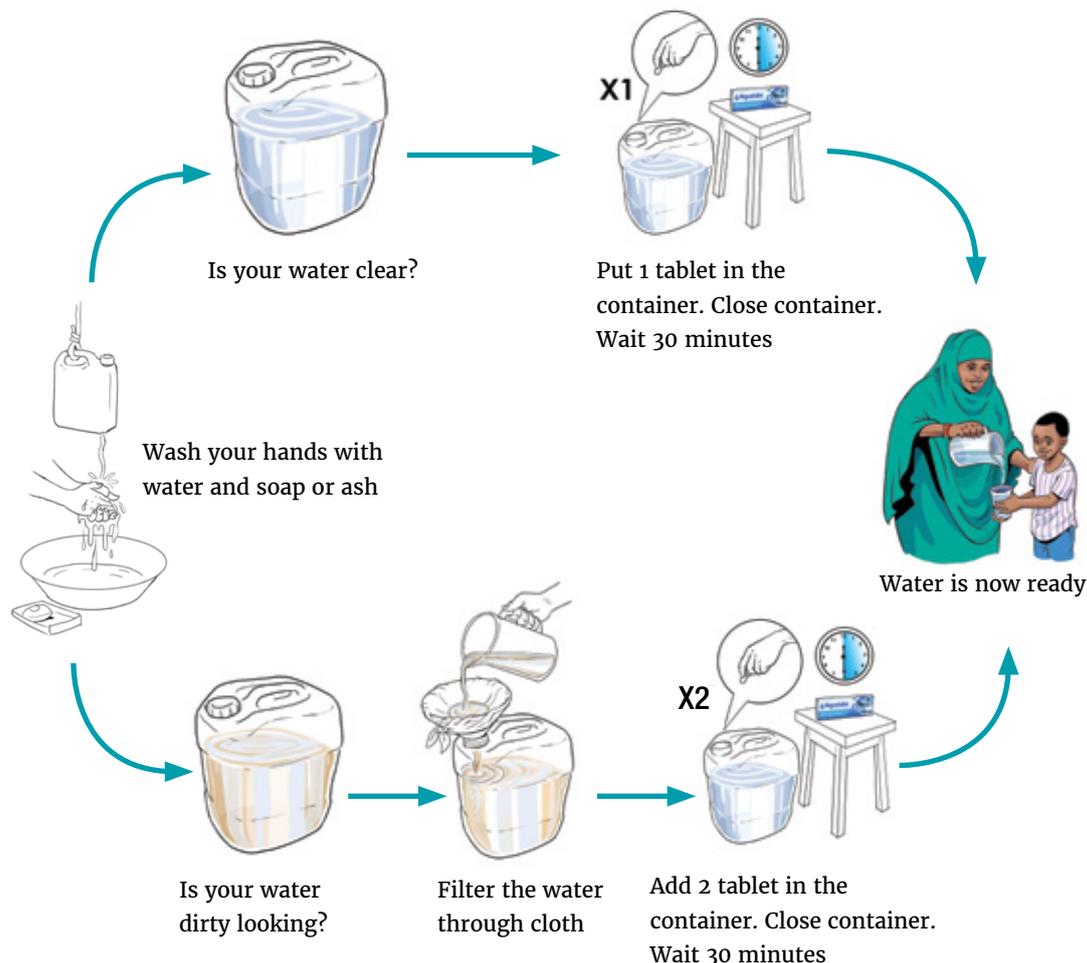
local market. They could no longer work as the place was submerged with water. We do hope in a month’s time it will dry up and we can start rebuilding our lives,” said Ibrahim.

Beletweyne hosts 31,000 displaced people, the majority of whom have fled conflict in the neighboring districts of Jalalqsi and Bulle Burte. The residents who live in low-lying areas moved to higher ground in El Jaale, five kilometres from Beletweyne.

We set up onion tanks in response to the drought in Somalia.



# HOW TO USE AN AQUATAB FOR WATER CHLORINATION



- To make sure water is safe to drink, boil or treat it with chlorine tablets and store it in clean containers
- Wash your hands before eating and after visiting the toilet.

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The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, doing everything it can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing Universal humanitarian principles.