

Almost Two Million Need Assistance in Drought-Stricken Region - UN

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Nearly two million people in Ethiopia's drought-stricken southern region urgently require food assistance, livestock support, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and health interventions, the United Nations said today, highlighting a worsening humanitarian situation that is affecting increasing numbers with funds running low.

Throughout the Somali region and the Borena zone of Orimiya region, some 1.7 million people require emergency food relief, however this number is being reassessed as the number of people affected and their needs are believed to have increased significantly since the last assessment in November, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

"Additionally, more than 740,000 people urgently need emergency water; and more than 1.5 million children under five require immunizations against diseases such as measles, which prey upon the malnourished," it said.

"To redress the situation, the United Nations agencies and partners have requested nearly \$14 million for emergency programmes in these sectors under the country's 2006 Humanitarian Appeal. However, only \$2.1 million has been received so far."

Within the Somali region, OCHA said the food security situation "is critical in some areas and deteriorating in others." Food assistance is being provided to 1.5 million people by the World Food Programme (WFP), in conjunction with the Government of Ethiopia and non-governmental partners.

Large numbers of livestock, including cattle, goats, sheep and camels, continue to die in the two areas due to lack of food and water, and diseases. In collaboration with regional authorities, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is providing anti-parasitic drugs for the livestock.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has provided five water purification units for the Somali region, which will provide 200,000 litres of water per day for 50,000 of the region's worst-hit people, and it is also providing assistance - alongside several non-governmental organizations in Borena zone.

UNICEF is also providing assistance to the health sector in both areas, including working alongside the Somali Regional Health Bureau in screening 97 per cent of children and 90 per cent of pregnant and nursing women for malnutrition, referring 26 per cent of children and 25 per cent of women for targeted supplementary feeding.

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