

Somalia Humanitarian Crisis Eases but 2million Somalis Still Need Aid

23 August 2010, Nairobi - The number of people needing humanitarian assistance in Somalia has dropped by 25 percent to 2 million in the last six months, easing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, according to a UN study published today.

But the report, by the Nairobi-based Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) with FEWSNET, warned that though Somalia received above average rains, boosting food production and livestock farming, these gains could easily be reversed. This is particularly relevant as the outlook for the next rainy season is poor.

"The current situation indicates an improvement but with 27 percent of the population still in crisis the needs remain very significant. And if the next rain season is poor, then the numbers in crisis will rise again" said Grainne Moloney, FSNAU's Chief Technical Advisor.

The recent long rainy season – from April to the end of June – was good. The season, also known as Gu, received above normal rainfall in most of the country, boosting production of maize and sorghum and improving conditions in the livestock sector, the major economic activity of the country.

Prolonged drought

These findings come after a prolonged drought reduced crop production, killed livestock and pushed 42 percent of Somalia's 7.5 million people into crisis in 2009. The situation was exacerbated by high food prices and high levels of civil insecurity.

"We are seeing some positive indicators in the agricultural sector, yet for the pastoralists in central, Hiran regions and parts of the north, they will need many more good seasons of rain to fully recover their herd sizes," added Grainne. It is estimated that 40 000 pastoralists have recently become destitute following the drought.

The FSNAU -- set up by FAO to provide aid agencies with reliable nutrition and food security data from Somalia -- also reported that although Somalia's nutrition situation has slightly improved in the north of the country, 90 percent of the estimated 35 000 severely malnourished children in the country remain in the conflict-stricken South Central zone.

IDPs

The study also highlighted the needs of the Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs), who have been forced from their homes due to conflict in recent years. The UN estimates that there are 1.41 million IDPs in Somalia.

FSNAU reported that the epicentre of the humanitarian crisis continues to be in central and Hiran regions, largely due to the long-term effects of the drought, high food prices and insecurity. In these regions efforts to meet the immediate needs of the populations are essential to prevent further deterioration. Somalia has been in crisis off and on since 1991 but the situation worsened in March 2007 when fighting resumed.

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Note to journalists: Copies of the report will be available on the website www.fsnau.org

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■ Nutrition

Although Somalia's nutrition situation has slightly improved in the north of the country, 90 percent of the estimated 35,000 severely malnourished children in the country, remain in the conflict stricken South Central zone. With one in six children acutely malnourished, and one in twenty two severely malnourished in south-central, the situation there remains one of the worst in the world. With shrinking humanitarian space and reduced access to basic services, such as health care and clean water, the ability for these children to meet their development potential is severely restricted.

■ Livestock

Overall, livestock production has significantly improved throughout the country due to increased pasture and water. This has also increased access to milk particularly in the South and significantly reduced milk prices. Good pastoral conditions prevail in most of Northern Somalia including the Sool plateau and Nugal Valley. However, pastoralists in Hiran, Central and Sanaag will take many seasons to recover the devastating effects of the drought.

■ Climate

The recent long rainy season – from April to the end of June – was generally good. The season, also known as Gu, received above normal rainfall in most of the country. The *Gu* season started unusually early this year in most parts of Somalia with first events observed in February in Gedo, Juba, Awdal and Galbeed regions.

■ Food Production

The good rains boosted production of maize and sorghum--the highest country-wide cereal production in 15 years. However, excessive rains led to floods with devastating effects on the Juba Riverine livelihood where many farmers suffered from considerable damage to the standing crops from early *Gu* planting. Further crop failure was reported in Hiran regions and the central agricultural areas due to poor rainfall.

■ Humanitarian Update

The number of people needing humanitarian assistance in Somalia has dropped, by 25 percent, to 2 million in the last six months. Sustained conflicts in the country continue to be the primary reason of displacement, affecting mainly southern and central parts of Somalia. The UN estimates that there are 1.41 million IDPs in Somalia. However 2 million in crisis represents 27% of the total population, thererfore this number still highlights a huge crisis.

■ Outlook

Early warning for the next season is not good - predicting La Nina, which may result in a below average rainfall, therefore these gains will not be maintained unless the resilience of the population is increased through disaster risk reduction including mitigation efforts and contingency planning.

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