

10 July 2011 - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today warned that two million children are malnourished as a result of the drought in the Horn of Africa, and half a million could soon die or suffer long-lasting mental or physical damage.

The agency appealed for nearly \$32 million to assist millions of children and women in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti, which are all facing a crisis that is being called the worst in 50 years.

"UNICEF estimates that over two million young children are malnourished and in need of urgent life-saving actions, if they are to survive conditions in drought-affected countries in the Horn of Africa," the agency said in a press statement.

"Half a million of those children are facing imminent life-threatening conditions, with long lasting consequences to their physical and mental development."

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) today said it is already assisting six million people in the affected countries, plus eastern Uganda, "but as the impact of the drought grows, we expect this number will rise to as much as 10 million."

High food prices and prolonged drought are worsening an already dire situation for thousands of families in need of food and water, according to UNICEF.

"Thousands of families are crossing the border from Somalia as emergency feeding centres are being set up by UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies in neighbouring countries," the agency said.

The refugee situation is growing with some 10,000 arriving every week in Dadaab on the border between Somalia and Kenya. Dadaab is the world's largest refugee camp.

"The threat of disease on already weakened young children is of particular concern and UNICEF is urgently setting up child immunization campaigns. UNICEF, government agencies, NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and other UN agencies will be working in the vital areas of water, food and sanitation in the coming days to ward off a massive emergency," said the agency.

"However funding shortfalls, and in some areas the denial of access, threaten to disrupt these essential services. UNICEF is asking for \$31.9 million for the coming three months to provide life-saving support to the millions of affected children and women."

WFP estimates it will need around \$477 million to address hunger needs in the region through to the end of the year, but it currently has a 40 per cent shortfall in funding amounting to around \$190 million.

Advance planning and forward-purchasing of food has positioned WFP to respond to the current needs, but as food requirements grow, more resources will need to be mobilized to address the needs of the hungry across the Horn of Africa region, the agency said.

WFP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the British-based Oxfam agency today issued a joint appeal for a more resilient and longer-lasting response to the drought and other "slow-onset" humanitarian crises.

Although the international community responds to sudden crises, "unfortunately, 'slow-onset' humanitarian crises, such as the worsening drought in the Horn in Africa, have not received the same attention, leaving millions of women, men and children vulnerable to devastating hunger and malnutrition," they stated.

The three agencies asked the international community to commit to longer-term, longer-lasting solutions, such as sustainable food assistance, support for small farmers, and support for policies and investments that address core challenges such as climate change adaptation, preparedness and disaster risk reduction and management, rural livelihoods, productive infrastructure, production and marketing, institutions and governance, conflict resolution, pastoralist issues and access to essential health and education.

Source: [UNICEF](#)