

Sharp rise in hungry Ethiopians needing aid: UN

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA: The number of hungry Ethiopians needing food aid has risen sharply this year to 4.5 million due to poor rains and the El Nino weather phenomenon, the UN has said.



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With rains poorer than predicted, "food insecurity increased and malnutrition rose as a result," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said. The number needing food aid has now risen to 4.5 million people, OCHA said, what is a 55 percent increase on the 2.9 million projected to require food assistance during the year.

Ethiopia hit hard

"The absence of rains means that the crops don't grow, the grass doesn't grow and people can't feed their animals," said David Del Conte, OCHA chief in Ethiopia.

Hardest-hit areas are Ethiopia's eastern Afar and southern Somali regions, while pastures and water resources are also unusually low in central and eastern Oromo region, and northern Tigray and Amhara districts. The US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) warned of "many emaciated livestock" in its latest report.

Ethiopia's government has mobilised \$33 million (30 million euros) in emergency aid, but the UN says it needs \$230 million (203 million euros) by the end of the year. Aid officials are worried about the slow pace of food distribution to affected areas partly due to congestion in the port of Djibouti, the main entry point for goods into landlocked Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country.

Vulnerable to weather challenges

Food insecurity is a sensitive issue in Ethiopia, hit by famine in 1984-85 after extreme drought. Today, Ethiopia's government would rather its reputation was its near-double-digit economic growth and huge infrastructure investment -- making the country one of Africa's top-performing economies and a magnet for foreign investment.

Still, nearly 20 million Ethiopians live below the \$1.25 poverty line set by the World Bank, with the poorest some of the most vulnerable to weather challenges.

The World Food Programme (WFP) said the "ongoing El Nino phenomenon may further affect" rains due to end next month. El Nino comes with a warming in sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific, and can cause unusually heavy rains

some parts of the world and drought elsewhere. "Challenges could continue into next year," said John Aylieff, World Food Programme head in Ethiopia.

Source: AFP

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