

'No time to lose' as humanitarian catastrophe looms in Somalia – UN agencies

17 February 2017 – Amid worsening of an already devastating drought in Somalia, United Nations agencies have underlined that only a massive and immediate scale-up of humanitarian assistance can help the country avoid falling into another catastrophe.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) some 6.2 million people – almost half the country's population – are either severely food insecure or in need of livelihood support.

"Huge numbers of Somalis have come to the end of all their possible resources and are living hand-to-mouth," said Steven Lauwerier, the UNICEF Somalia Representative, underlining that there is only a small window of opportunity to arrest the looming humanitarian crisis and save lives.

The situation of children is particularly concerning: close to one million children are estimated to be malnourished this year, including 185,000 severely malnourished and in need of urgent lifesaving support. There are also grave fears that this number could increase to 270,000 over the coming months.

The ongoing drought and other shocks have left communities – that have already been battered by decades of conflict – with little to no resources to fall back on, the two UN agencies said in a joint news release.

Whole villages have lost their crops or seen their livestock die. The prices of water and locally produced food have risen dramatically, and thousands of people are on the move in search of food and water.

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The drought has also led to an increase in waterborne diseases with more than 4,000 cases of Acute Watery Diarrhoea/Cholera this year.

"Humanitarian assistance has saved lives in the drought-affected north over the past year, but as the crisis spreads we have no time to lose," added WFP Country Director Laurent Bukera, noting that together with its partners, the UN agency is "moving as quickly as possible" to reach people with lifesaving support.

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The two agencies further noted that humanitarian access remains conqueringly limited in some drought-affected areas of the south, but that WFP and UNICEF are reinforcing their joint efforts to scale up the response in areas that are accessible, where millions of lives are at risk.

The agencies have been responding together to the drought by providing food and water vouchers to hundreds of thousands across the most affected areas of Somalia as well as nutrition assistance.

As additional resources are mobilised, the joint response will continue to expand in the most vulnerable regions.

However, with growing needs, more funds are needed. UNICEF and WFP together still require more than \$450 million to be able to provide urgent assistance required in the coming months.