

ALERT: Pre-famine in Somalia

Between malnutrition and death, there is disease

23 February 2017 -- Somalia is on the brink of famine. An immediate scale-up of the drought response is required to prevent the worst-case scenario.

A pre-famine alert was issued for Somalia on 2 February 2017 by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. Over the past six months, the food security and nutrition situation has deteriorated significantly and a third famine in 25 years is a real possibility. More than 360,000 acutely malnourished and 70,000 severely malnourished children currently need urgent and life-saving support.

It is not a lack of food alone that causes malnourished children to die, but rather the illnesses they contract as a result of their weakened immune systems. In Somalia right now, a lack of clean water, exacerbated by drought, is contributing to an increased risk of communicable diseases. Nearly 5.5 million people in Somalia are at risk of acquiring cholera, with more than 4000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea already reported in 2017 (as of 5 February).

Health is therefore a key component of the response. Necessary interventions include the medical management of severe malnutrition, but also the detection and control of deadly diseases such as measles, acute respiratory infections, malaria, diarrhoea and waterborne diseases. If funding is secured, the World Health Organization (WHO) plans to:

- **Expand leadership and coordination of the health and nutrition response.** For example, four existing WHO hubs (in Mogadishu, Garowe, Hargeisa and Baidoa) will be strengthened, to help provide sub-national coordination. As Health Cluster lead agency, WHO supports the Ministry of Health to coordinate the response of 85 partners.
- **Improve access to essential life-saving health services in drought-affected areas.** This includes providing 1400 basic interagency emergency health kits, containing enough medicines to treat 1.4 million patients for common diseases for three months.
- **Strengthen epidemic disease surveillance and response,** adding 100 more disease surveillance reporting sites to the national surveillance system, taking the total number of sites to 365, and forming 14 rapid response teams to respond to disease outbreaks.
- **Prevent avoidable nutrition-related deaths and illness among vulnerable groups.** This will include community-based screening for malnutrition in 50 districts in collaboration with the polio surveillance program and UNICEF.

A total of **US\$ 9,822,814 million** is requested by WHO for the first half of 2017 **to reach 1,482,000 people** with life-saving assistance health and nutrition services in 12 of the most drought-affected regions and 50 of the most drought-affected districts of Somalia.

In 2016, WHO worked with partners to achieve the following:

- An estimated 2.3 million children were vaccinated against polio and 192,000 vaccinated against measles.
- Cholera treatment centres were established in Bakool, lower Shabelle, Bay, lower Juba and Hiraan and supported with medical supplies. Staff were trained on case management.
- Support was provided for 980,899 health consultations, 385 primary healthcare facilities and 78 hospitals/referral health centres.

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