

East Africa Reeling from Prolonged Drought

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East Africa drought leaves millions in need

Oxfam urges more aid; European Union releases \$75 million more

The Associated Press, Dec . 17, 2009

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NAIROBI,  
Kenya - Millions of people in drought-stricken East Africa face hunger  
and poverty after seasonal rains failed again, withering crops, killing  
livestock and drying up ponds and streams, an aid group said Thursday,
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Oxfam said some areas had received less than 5 percent of normal rainfall for November. In war-ravaged Somalia, it is the sixth failed rainy season and the worst drought for 20 years. The failed state is already being torn apart by a brutal civil war that means nearly half its population relies on aid.

Diplomats said the suffering underscores the need for an agreement to combat climate change. African delegates at the Copenhagen talks on climate change have repeatedly accused rich industrialized countries of polluting the atmosphere with greenhouse gases and then leaving underdeveloped countries to deal with the resulting drought and starvation on their own.

"We face a disastrous situation in the Horn of Africa that demonstrates the terrible potential of climate change. This crisis, which is happening now, underlines why it is so important to reach an agreement in Copenhagen," said Karel De Gucht, the European Union's development commissioner.

The European Commission said it would immediately release an extra \$75 million to fund emergency relief for drought-stricken areas in the Horn of Africa. It estimates 16 million people will need aid in the coming months.

Oxfam said in its report that the failure of the November "short" rains in many pockets of East Africa after several dry seasons will intensify hunger and disease. Heavily used and polluted water sources have not been replenished. Millions of people are at risk in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and Tanzania, Oxfam said.

The semiarid and arid areas depend on the October-November rainfall, called the short rains, for most of their water needs for the year. A failure of the rains means those areas will have poor or no harvests for the coming year.

"More must be done to invest in helping these communities cope with the dry years — through long-term rural development and investing in national agriculture. But in the short-term lives are at stake and emergency aid is needed now," said Jeremy Loveless, Oxfam's deputy humanitarian director.

A September report by the International Food Policy Research Institute predicted that the worldwide effects of climate change will lead to twenty-five million additional children becoming malnourished by 2050. Aid agencies have long said that droughts are becoming more frequent in Africa, where many living in arid areas are particularly vulnerable to changes in the weather.

Oxfam said cattle prices have tumbled from \$200 to \$4 in some areas as families try to sell dying animals to buy a few handfuls of corn. Over 1.5 million animals have died in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, with an estimated net worth to the region of nearly \$360 million, Oxfam said.

For many nomadic families living without access to banking facilities, cattle represent their only wealth. The animals' deaths begin a spiral into poverty and dependency that can trap a family for generations. Families have even shared relief grain with their animals, trying to keep at least a few alive to restock in the future.

"The population can no longer cope with such extreme and protracted hardship which often comes on top of conflict situations," De Gucht said.

In addition to the war in Somalia, rebel groups are battling the central government in Ethiopia, which has restricted access to aid agencies. In northern Kenya and parts of Uganda, heavily armed ethnic militias conduct cattle raids and fight over precious grazing ground

and water.

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