



Kenya: Poor Rains Deepen Drought, Children Go Hungry - UNICEF

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By Sebastien Malo

New York — Kenya has been ravaged by what the United Nations calls the worst drought since the 2011 Horn of Africa food crisis that led to famine in parts of Somalia

The number of children in need of life-saving aid continues to grow in Kenya amid one of most punishing droughts in years and another disappointing rainy season, the United Nations' children agency said on Friday.

With crops failing and livestock producing too little milk, nearly 370,000 children across the East African country aren't getting enough to eat, an increase of 30,000 from February, UNICEF said.

Kenya, despite having the highest per capita income in the region, has been ravaged by what the United Nations calls the worst drought since the 2011 Horn of Africa food crisis that led to famine in parts of Somalia.

Kenya's northern Turkana and Marsabit counties, home to pastoralist communities, have been hardest hit, with one in three children there acutely malnourished.

UNICEF, which is giving aid to the Kenyan government to overcome the effects of the drought, said hunger was spreading faster than its humanitarian assistance.

"We have reached 60 percent more children with life-saving assistance in the first half of 2017 compared to 2016, yet more and more children are becoming malnourished," said Werner Schultink, UNICEF's representative in Kenya, in a statement.

The deepening crisis is largely due to another disappointing rainy season, the third since early 2016, UNICEF said.

And the already dire situation is compounded by a nationwide nurses' strike, it said.

Now in its third month, the strike over poor pay has led to patients being sent away from some hospitals.

UNICEF called for more resources not only to keep children healthy and nourished, but also tackle knock-on effects of the food crisis, such as children being pulled out of school as their families flee the drought and others being sent to work.

"We need to make nutritious food, safe water and basic health care far more accessible to vulnerable children and families," said Schultink.

Nationwide, nearly one in five people in Kenya, or 9 million people, are undernourished, according to a report on the state of nutrition worldwide which the United Nations released on Friday in Rome.

Kenya has lowered its 2017 economic growth forecast to 5.5 percent due to drought and political uncertainty, a top official said on Friday.

(Reporting by Sebastien Malo @sebastienmalo, Editing by Ros Russell; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights, climate change and resilience. Visit <http://news.trust.org>)