

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT TO THE PRESS

As Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, I have had meetings with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, the Director General of DPPA, plus UN agencies, some donors and NGO representatives.

From UNICEF's side we are pleased that the Ethiopian government and partners have agreed on an updated assessment of the food and nutrition situation in the country. As you are aware, we currently estimate that 4,6 million people are in need of food aid, of which 75 000 children directly affected by severe and acute malnutrition. The estimated need for assistance is USD 325 million.

This most recent requirement-document shows that the government is committed to address the food and nutrition crisis that is now unfolding in several regions in the country. The situation is particularly precarious for children.

Visit to the field

I came to Ethiopia to assess the situation myself, and have undertaken visits to the Southern part of the country, to SNNP, Guage Zone, covering Therapeutic Feeding centres and stabilization centres in Marako, and to Kambata Zone, where I visited a stabilization centre covering Kwacha Bira, Tumtu and Hadero areas. Together with our nutrition- and emergency experts we have analyzed the situation on the ground and it is our assessment that the situation is extremely serious according to the most recent data. Children are now at risk of dying in numbers in the hardest hit areas if help is not provided urgently. The government and partners are doing their utmost to help, but needs are not met - at present - with adequate speed. More resources need to be provided.

We talked to mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers and all actors in the field, the health officials of the zones, the health extension workers, the professionals deployed and key partners among the NGOs. A clear message was conveyed from all: There is no food. The assistance needs to be taken to scale, and it has to happen urgently.

This regards not only therapeutic feeding, which is UNICEF's main area of support. This is also the case for supplementary feeding. In our view, it is urgent that WFP provides supplementary feeding in large quantities to

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these areas, both to avoid children from falling into acute malnutrition, and to prevent those having undergone treatment from falling back into severe malnutrition.

We also have reports from the field in other regions, covering Oromiya, Somali region and other parts of SNNPR, and increasingly also from some parts of Amhara, and early signals from Southern Tigray. There are indications of a potentially critical situation also in several of these regions with regard to food supplies and food security. However, the nutrition and health situation needs need to be further assessed.

As the harvest is not due in most areas until late September, we are concerned that the situation may worsen the next 2 – 3 months. Steps are being taken by the government to provide food supplies both from international purchase and from bilateral aid. However, we are still very worried that WFP only has funding to cater for about half the needs that are required for June and July. Only in September the delivery of food aid is likely to be up to the required levels, providing for 4,6 million people. Our main concern is that lack of an adequate response in the short term can further exacerbate the situation for children, who are also dependent on the availability of adequate food in their households.

With the onset of rains, the affected population may be able to supplement their food needs with vegetables and other complementary food sources. However, we do not know at this stage whether this will happen and how adequate such measures will prove to be. As humanitarian agencies, we need to be prepared for any eventuality, not least through adequate response capacity and resources. Hence – we need to take action in two ways:

Firstly, we need to address immediate needs

5 critical and urgent steps need to be taken:

1. ***Scaling up therapeutic feeding in all affected areas of the country.*** The current estimate implies that UNICEF needs more than \$ 15 million to cater for these interventions. This basically is about saving lives of thousands of children.
2. ***Scaling up supplementary feeding in all affected areas.*** WFP has, as yet, not received adequate support from donors to cater for these needs. This is a fundamental part of the response to the survival of children. It is critical that these needs are met.
3. ***Urgent nationwide assessment of the nutrition situation covering all affected regions.*** This should happen in conjunction with the assessment of food needs already in the pipeline for July. Further assessment is needed as soon as possible in order to provide the necessary response. This includes the pastoralist areas of the country, including the Somali region.
4. ***Address health hazards on the basis of careful monitoring,*** including Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD), pneumonia, measles and malaria. These are also fundamental for child survival.

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5. **Emergency provisions** of safe drinking water, as well as supporting sanitation and hygiene education, especially in areas of increased risk for disease transmission (such as Therapeutic feeding-centres and Stabilization-centres).

The total estimate of these and other immediate actions within the agreed requirements is about USD 28 million. UNICEF is calling on donors to respond to these needs urgently. In addition, the provision of food aid generally is important for livelihoods to be sustained and for the situation of children not to deteriorate further. Hence, the funding situation of WFP is of major concern also for UNICEF.

Secondly, we need to take mitigating measures – and be prepared

3 critical preparatory measures need to be taken:

1. **Strengthen assessment and monitoring:** To ensure timely and adequate action UNICEF is committed to help strengthen the assessment, monitoring and surveillance systems especially in the areas of nutrition and health.
2. **Strengthen local government capacity:** To be able to respond to the dynamic challenges the next few months, capacity on the ground is essential. UNICEF is committed to help train local government staff to address these evolving emergency challenges. This is absolutely essential in view of the speed with which we have seen these life threatening conditions for children develop recently.
3. **Ensure adequate supplies:** The strategic pre-positioning of essential supplies for children, such as therapeutic food, essential medicines, water purification and sanitation materials is critical for our capacity to respond. This is very high priority for us.

Should the situation worsen, UNICEF needs to be prepared. These measures will enable us to respond adequately should a deterioration of the situation occur the next critical months. At the moment, we do not have such supplies available. We will ask donors for additional support to be able to put in place these critical mitigating measures. They will amount to around USD 20 million.

As a result of this appeal, and our updated Humanitarian Action Report which will be presented in Geneva this week, we hope to see much more funds coming in support of Ethiopian children.