

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

Office of the United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia

Springette, Off Lower Kabete Road, 1st left after Spring Valley Police Station, P.O. Box 28832, 00200, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel. (25420) 4183640, 4183642/3/4; Fax (25420) 4183641

One of the Worst Floods in Recent History Hits Somalia - Up to One Million People Could Be Affected in the Coming Weeks

The humanitarian crisis in southern Somalia is deepening, as the Shabelle and Juba Valley river basins are potentially facing one of the worst floods in recent history. Already 50,000 people were displaced by severe floods in Hiran region over the weekend, and serious floods are ongoing in parts of Middle and Lower Juba. Some stations in Somalia have recorded more than 400-600% of their normal recorded rainfall. It is anticipated that up to one million people could be directly affected by the flooding throughout Shabelle and Juba valley river basins over the coming weeks. This is according to flood modeling projections from technical UN early warning agencies FAO Somalia Water and Land Information Management, the FAO Food Security Analysis Unit and FEWSNET.

Over the last weekend, the Shabelle River in Beletweyne, Hiran Region hit a 50-year return period flood level, submerging the river gauging site, the main bridge, and inundated the entire town of Beletweyne. More than 80% of the town's population is displaced, while another 30 villages downstream are flooded. At the end of October, river levels at Luuq in Juba reached close to the highest recorded in recent history.

"Given the situation in Hiran, communities further downstream will also be at high risk as the water surge reaches Middle and Lower Shabelle", says Eric Laroche, Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia. "In these regions, we expect the situation to get worse." The Greater Horn region is currently experiencing a moderate El-Nino. According to the seasonal forecast of IGAD's Climate Predictions and Applications Centre, the prevailing abnormal rains are expected to continue into early 2007.

Humanitarian response, particularly along the Shabelle River, has been ongoing since mid-September. To date, food relief, shelter materials and tens of thousands of treated mosquito nets and sandbags have been provided by WFP, UNICEF, WHO and a number of NGOs, including CARE and CONCERN. In Gedo, an inter-agency rapid needs assessment is being undertaken to determine the extent of the damage, identify urgent needs, and establish access routes to populations in need. Meanwhile, contingency planning for a worst case scenario of concurrent floods and widespread conflict is ongoing. Any outbreak of fighting resulting from a deterioration in the present political stand-off would have a severe negative impact on the ability of communities to cope with the worsening floods and exacerbate already precarious food security and livelihoods conditions. UNICEF, CARE and Save the Children (UK) have assumed lead response roles in the three of the worst flood-affected areas, which are Jowhar, Lower Shabelle and Hiran.

"The flooding is particularly worrying, given security constraints and other obstacles to access (including flooding itself) that have recently reduced the operational space for humanitarian actors," says Laroche. With several primary roads – including those from Wajid to Baidoa, Kismayo to Mogadishu, and Kamsuma to Jilib and Kismayo – currently impassable, flights are in many cases the only means of transporting aid supplies. However, current capacity to deliver emergency food and non-food items, particularly in Beletweyne, now hinges on immediate air access from Kenya to Somalia. On 11 November the Kenyan government suspended all flights into Somalia, but Laroche is optimistic that the ban will be lifted for humanitarian flights.

Save the Children estimates that the immediate survival needs for those displaced from Beletweyne alone include 29,536 sacks of 50kg of food for one month, 11,000 plastic sheets, 44,000 blankets and 33,000 mosquito nets. The provision of water treatment tablets and chlorine for shallow wells is also absolutely essential to prevent outbreaks of water-borne diseases. UNICEF and Save the Children have available limited non-food item stocks in Nairobi ready to be delivered to Somalia once flights resume, while UNICEF is already moving non-food items by road from Mogadishu to Beletweyne.

For further information, contact: Amanda Di Lorenzo or Rita Maingi at OCHA Somalia, Tel. (25420) 375 4150-5