

Somalia Famine Spurs World Vision to Action

As the U.N. declares famine in two regions of Somalia and warns of others to follow, World Vision is calling on the international community for help. The Christian humanitarian group is asking for assurances from the various armed groups that people dispatched in humanitarian efforts in the South Central region where millions of children are in urgent need of food and assistance have safe access to affected areas.

“As a child-focused relief, development and advocacy organization, we are driven by the humanitarian imperative—to seek to alleviate the suffering of those most in need. But when those who are most in need, like so many children in the worst parts of Somalia, live in places we cannot safely access, we are unable to assist them. So we are urgently asking all those who have the influence to assist,” says World Vision East Africa Leader, Charles Owubah.

The United Nations declared on Wednesday that famine exists in two regions of southern Somalia: southern Bakool and Lower Shabelle. Across the country, nearly half the Somali population—3.7 million people—is living in crisis. An estimated 2.8 million of those are in the south.

Consecutive droughts have affected families across the country and the ongoing conflict has made it extremely difficult for organizations such as World Vision to operate and access communities in the south of the country. World Vision worked in South Central Somalia directly implementing humanitarian programs from 1992 until the al-Shabaab group demanded that World Vision and several other organizations leave in August 2010.

“We continue to implement programs in Somaliland and affected

areas in Puntland,” says World Vision Somalia Operations Director Graham Davison. “But we would like to extend our help to those affected by the drought and famine in South Central Somalia. We have been told of heartbreaking conditions of families’ daily struggles to survive in areas where we used to work, which is motivating us all to work faster to do all we can.”

World Vision has been and continues to conduct security assessments aimed at informing operational decisions about the possibility of returning to South Central Somalia.

Inconsistent rains over the past year have resulted in severe drought for both pastoralists and urban communities. In Puntland, where World Vision is working, many families are suffering from the seventh consecutive failed rainy season. Most of the water catchments have dried up, forcing people and animals to consume water from the same areas and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

World Vision is already responding in Puntland, assisting local people affected by the drought. For families fleeing conflict and drought in the south, World Vision is providing nutrition supplements to malnourished children, improving healthcare and sanitation, increasing the capacity of earth dams in anticipation of rains and beginning livelihood activities to enhance communities’ economic conditions.

“We expect that there will be further arrivals of those affected by drought in the coming days and weeks, putting further strain on coping mechanisms, so we are preparing teams and supplies to scale up our work in response,” says Davison.