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**Aid levels must be sustained to consolidate humanitarian gains**

*Bumper harvest provides respite, but 2.34 million Somalis remain in crisis*

Nairobi (3 February 2012) – The combination of the massive scale-up in humanitarian assistance and an exceptional harvest have helped to improve the humanitarian situation in Somalia where famine conditions are no longer present, but any significant interruption to assistance would reverse the gains made since famine was declared last July, according to analysis released today by the Food and Agricultural Organisation’s Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS NET). The latest data shows that 2.34 million Somalis still need life-saving assistance and the situation is expected to deteriorate again in May.

“The gains are fragile and will be reversed without continued support,” said Mark Bowden, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia. “There are 1.7 million people in southern Somalia still in crisis. Millions of people still need food, clean water, shelter and other assistance to survive and the situation is expected to deteriorate in May.”

“We need to use this temporary relief from the worst of the crisis to focus our efforts on life-saving assistance, while building up people’s ability to cope with future drought – and thereby reduce their dependence on aid,” said Bowden. “Recovery is only possible after August if the rains are good and other external factors, such as conflict, do not hamper the progress made so far.”

According to FSNAU and FEWS NET analysis released today, the parts of Middle Shabelle and areas hosting internally displaced people in Mogadishu and Afgooye corridor, where famine conditions persisted, improved to pre-famine levels. Famine was declared in Somalia on 20 July. By November, parts of Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle regions had improved to pre-famine, emergency levels.

The latest FSNAU and FEWS Net data shows that sustained humanitarian efforts were boosted by the current exceptional harvest following the *Deyr* rains. The harvest, which was double the average of the past 17 years, provides 10 per cent of Somalia’s food requirements in normal years.

“This extraordinary harvest gives an important boost to continuing humanitarian efforts. In particular, it benefits agro-pastoralists, who were disproportionately affected by the crisis. However, this may only be a respite and years of conflict and poor rains have left millions of Somalis vulnerable. Mortality rates in many parts of southern Somalia are still among the highest in the world, mainly because of malnutrition and disease outbreaks,” said Bowden.

“The exceptional harvest resulted in lower food prices and increased the availability of food to people in the areas most affected by drought. Vulnerable Somalis will face another ‘lean period’ in the months before the major harvest. Sustained assistance is critical to consolidating the gains that have been made and further reducing Somalia’s distressingly high levels of malnutrition and mortality. Traditional and new donors were very generous last year. Somalis need that assistance to continue.”

“Through innovative programming and strengthening local partnerships we were able to mitigate the worst effects of the famine. However, access to people in need will remain a major challenge. We rely substantially on the humanity of all parties to conflict to demonstrate their continuous commitment to Somali people. All actors have a responsibility to respect international humanitarian law and grant unconditional access to vulnerable people. Similarly, all parties must minimize the impact of conflict on civilians,” said Bowden.

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