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Vol. # 15
August 15, 2008

Djibouti and food emergency

Recurrent droughts, in addition to rising food and kerosene prices, have exacerbated food insecurity in the Horn of Africa country of Djibouti, according to a senior UN official.

The country has a high population of nomadic pastoralists. Food insecurity had, however, forced the nomadic people to cut the number of meals they ate per day and reduced the quality of the food. Successive droughts had also increased migration from rural to urban areas as the population moved in search of jobs. As a result, unemployment in Djibouti City stood at 60 percent, according to a July report by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS Net).

"Rising food prices are having a double impact of not only reducing food security but also the ability of families to assist each other," Marcus Prior, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) spokesman for East and Central Africa said. Most of the rural population relies on remittances from relatives in urban centers.

"The rising cost of living is undermining food security more than usual, particularly for poor households whose monthly income is far below the cost of the minimum expenditure basket," stated the FEWS Net report. Kerosene prices had also gone up by 50 percent compared with the five-year average.

Djibouti imports most of its food requirements. In addition to increased obstacles to food access, Djibouti City was facing critical water shortages, with rationing being initiated by the government.

"In the worst case, a total of 341,000 people [54 percent of the population] are expected to need emergency food and water supplies by August," stated the FEWS Net report. At least 55,000 people are in urgent need of food assistance in Djibouti City, according to FEWS Net. WFP needed US\$18 million for operations in Djibouti until March 2009, Prior said. "We urgently need assistance from the international community to provide the support vitally needed by the population."



Nomadic shepherds leaving rural areas.

Floods in Africa, a problem that gets bigger

Weeks of rains in Togo have forced thousands of people from their homes into temporary government-run centers set up throughout the capital, Lome.

Togo's head of Red Cross Disaster Relief, Victor Sodogas, estimates more than 6,000 people, including approximately 1,000 children, have sought shelter in six government centers that do not have designated sleeping quarters. "They just sleep in the processing areas. There are no mosquito nets yet in the centers, which may become more of an issue as the rainy season continues to push people into these shelters."

Climatologist Michel Boko from the University of Cotonou in Benin says weather trends point to more flooding during this year's rainy season, which typically is from May to September.

The regional disaster preparedness manager for West Africa, Jerry Niati, with the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), says that while people cannot fight nature, they can prepare for it. But few do, he says. Last year, floods throughout Africa displaced more than one million people, wiping out swaths of cropland, and sparking a fatal outbreak of cholera in sub-Saharan Africa. Togo's government announced last week that rains starting 15 July have led to the collapse of nine bridges and stranded thousands.

Torrential rain in the Chadian capital N'djamena has caused serious flooding that has cut off parts of the suburbs from the city centre.

Collapsed houses, flooded streets and deep pools of stagnant water are visible throughout the low-rise, desert capital. Immediate figures on the number of people affected were not available from the government.

Ngarmbatina Carmelle Sou IV, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, said the government would do its utmost for the people affected. “What I have seen is disturbing to me,” the minister said. “It is within our mandate to give support. We must get to work to offer assistance to our brothers and sisters.”

Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno has also visited some of the flooded parts of the capital and pledged the government will do more to dig drainage canals.

The Chadian national meteorological agency has stated in a communication that Chad risks “serious flooding” this year. According to the agency, climate and rainfall in the region is cyclical. Major floods were last recorded in Chad in 1988 and 1998.



Last year this was a road for emergency transport.

Disaster relief teams have fanned out across West Africa to assess how badly the region was hit during the past month of heavy rains. Tens of thousands were affected in Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger, Liberia and Mauritania according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA).

In Niger, more than 40,000 thousand people were affected by heavy rains which started on 14 July. In the country’s second most populated city, Zinder, hundreds are camping in the local elementary school.

In Togo, heavy rainfall has led to bridge collapse, and cut off most of the cell phone network. A team from the International Monetary Fund is expected 27 August to review flood damage as a part of its more than US\$60 million commitment.

Major donors cut off most aid to Togo during recent years of bloody tumult, which included allegedly rigged elections and army crackdowns that sent thousands fleeing to some friend countries. Donors are slowly coming back following Togo's 2007 legislative election, which monitors said was mostly free and fair.

According to the World Bank, Togo has accrued more than US\$100 million in debt since 2002 from past World Bank loans. The European Union recently approved a five-year more than US\$180 million loan, which will partly go toward rebuilding the country's infrastructure.



People in general have severe obstacles to do their daily activities.

Source: www.irinnews.org



Comments: I personally believe that these people should continue trusting in themselves; because that is the only way they will succeed in this extreme situation. No matter how sad was yesterday, tomorrow can be better if we work together. It is unbelievable these things are happening as experts said ten or more years ago. It is obvious we are guilty, but I know we have a chance to change it!

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