

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

## FOOD CRISIS IN KENYA

### Q&A

**Fears are being expressed that another poor rainy season could lead to a ‘severe’ humanitarian crisis in Kenya. The Kenya meteorological department is already predicting the long rains will be poorly distributed and too little. It follows an appeal from the government for food aid for up to ten million people.**

**Yves Horent is the head of the Kenya office at the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and is following the food crisis in Kenya.**

**Question: Is ten million a realistic figure?**

**Yves Horent:** Findings from the Kenya Food Security Steering Group show that 9.8 million Kenyans are food insecure, meaning they cannot afford enough food to meet their daily needs. There are a host of reasons for this including the current high prices of commodities and weaker purchasing power. According to our partner agencies, of the 9.8 million people, around 3.5 million need food aid to survive.

**Q: The weather forecast is looking bad; what effect is this likely to have on the already fragile food security in Kenya?**

**YH:** There are two possibilities – the rains could be sufficient or poor. If the country receives ample rains, the food scarcity will subside, although it will still take a considerable time for the country to fully recover. However, if the rains are poor, we could have a severe humanitarian crisis of a magnitude similar to what was experienced in 2001 when over 4 million people needed food aid. With poor rains, parts of the country could face extreme acute malnutrition especially amongst children.

**Q: What is the ECHO doing to lessen to effects of the worsening food crisis?**

**YH:** The European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) has allocated €5 million (\$US6.75m) for the treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition. In Kenya, this fund covers the arid and semi-arid lands in Eastern, North Eastern, Rift Valley, and Coast provinces.

ECHO is also monitoring the rains and the nutrition levels of the communities at risk while mobilizing resources to allow a quick response, should the situation deteriorate further. At the same time, the Commission is continually helping pastoralists to cope with the effects of the erratic rains through a drought preparedness programme.

Humanitarian workers are also getting the opportunity to reach some of the remotest places in Kenya through the ECHO Flight air service.

**Q: The Kenyan government and some humanitarian agencies are appealing for money, much of it for food aid. Is this the way to tackle the problem?**

**YH:** Each humanitarian emergency elicits a distinct response, because circumstances are always different. The European Commission's response to any humanitarian emergency is based on a keen evaluation of the situation. Over time, we have learnt that food aid is important, but other interventions too must be given prominence for the response to be effective.

The current crisis in Kenya requires not only food aid, but also the treatment of malnourished populations, provision of water through emergency operations such as trucking, and making best use of existing water sources. Likewise, food security ought to receive more attention with support to the agricultural sector and livestock programmes taking the front row. The Commission is providing this support.

**Q: What is the root cause of the food shortage in Kenya and who is most affected?**

**YH:** The food crisis has largely hit the arid and semi-arid areas, which make up over 80% of the country's land surface so a very wide geographical area is affected.

One of the factors causing the food crisis in Kenya is the performance of the last four consecutive rains, which has been poor. Consequently, the country has not recovered from the devastating 2006 drought and the communities, especially in the dry lands are still very vulnerable. Any further stress could tip the scale over to a humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, the price of food commodities remains very high. The trade environment means that prices are unlikely to come down significantly.

**Q: How can Kenya improve its food security?**

**YH:** The country could engage in development programmes to cushion the people from food insecurity. For instance, the Humanitarian Aid department is backing drought preparedness programmes that involve keeping suitable livestock, providing clean water, protecting the environment and increasing food production. The Commission is also providing farmers access to affordable farm and livestock inputs.