

Ethiopia Warns Emergency Drought Aid to Run Out Next Month

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A man carries food aid in the Afar province of Ethiopia. *Photographer: Mohammed Abdu Abdulbaqi/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

Warder, Ethiopia (AP) -- Ethiopia's government is warning it will run out of emergency food aid starting next month as the number of drought victims in the East African country has reached 7.8 million.

An international delegation visited one of the worst-affected areas Friday near the border with Somalia, which suffers from widespread drought as well. Several hundred people lined the dusty road to meet the officials at the remote airstrip, while rail-thin camels and goats roamed in the bushes. Animal carcasses littered the ground.

"I came to this area after losing nearly all my goats and camels due to lack of rain," 75-year-old Ader Ali Yusuf said quietly, wiping her cheek with her headscarf as she sat with other women observing the delegation from afar. The mother of 12 is just one of thousands of Ethiopians who have walked up to three days on foot to displacement camps for aid.

Ethiopia's disaster relief chief Mitiku Kassa told The Associated Press that the country needs more than \$1 billion for emergency food assistance. Seasonal rains have been critically small and local cattle are dying. The number of drought victims has risen by two million people in the past four

months.

The risk of an acute food and nutritional disaster is "very high," the disaster relief chief said.

The International Organization for Migration said hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced, with the problem compounded as people pour into Ethiopia from Somalia.

A United Nations humanitarian envoy said donor fatigue and similar crises elsewhere have hurt aid efforts. Both Somalia and neighboring South Sudan are among four countries recently singled out by the United Nations in a \$4.4 billion aid appeal to avert catastrophic hunger and famine. Already, famine has been declared for two counties in South Sudan.

"Our main concern should be for this drought in Ethiopia not to degenerate into a famine," said the humanitarian envoy, Ahmed Al- Meraikhi. The United Nations has warned that Ethiopia's drought will pose a severe challenge to the humanitarian community by mid-July with the current slow pace of aid.

Along with the drought, Ethiopia also faces an outbreak of what authorities call acute watery diarrhea, though critics have said the government should call it cholera instead.

"I've never seen the resources so poor to respond to the crisis," the country director for aid group Save the Children, John Graham, said of the drought. "It is very worrying. These people are not going to be able to continue to survive in these dilapidated displaced people's camps. It could get very much worse. We are also worried that some of the children affected by the drought may die."

