

## East Africa famine crisis: situation summary

### *How the situation arose*

- 20 million people across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are facing starvation and urgently need food relief and water aid.
- Now facing their third failed harvest, the region's rains have repeatedly failed since late 2008. Food prices have naturally rocketed, meaning that those most in need cannot afford basic foodstuffs, and governments are priced out of providing food relief to their own people. Crop seed has also been wasted, and livestock, household's primary lasting capital, are dying or already gone.
- Since January 2009, 16 Mothers' Union dioceses across Kenya have been in conversation with Mothers' Union international office about relief aid distribution and financing it from the international Mothers' Union Relief Fund.
- Bondo Diocese wrote to us, "The drought has resulted in severe famine and diseases of which many people have lost lives. People have been preparing their farms for the long rains season and have planted at least three times awaiting for rains to come, but in vain."
- In the last few months Mothers' Union Uganda have also made relief appeals to us, and this week Tanzania approached us. One Mothers' Union Trustee from Uganda told us last week, "People are dying. People are pulling the leaves from the trees and boiling them and eating them. Because there is nothing else."

### *What we have sent*

- Despite severe pressures on Mothers' Union funds, the need was so great that since January 2009 we have now sent a total of £74,000 Relief Aid.
- To Uganda we have sent £40,000 Relief Aid. So a total of £114,000 and a further outlay to Mothers' Union Tanzania, the amount still being decided but likely to be of similar proportions to match the need.
- This money has bought maize, soya beans, cooking oil, salt, rice and porridge flour (unimix). We have also allocated a small amount of money to the petrol necessary for Mothers' Union distributors to get to isolated villages and farming communities.
- Alongside food-aid, communities need help with new seed for planting. In particular they need crops which will grow quickly to harvest so that people can feed themselves again.

- However, Salome Leipa, Mothers' Union Provincial Coordinator for Kenya, has urgent appeals for over £190,000 to fulfil. She writes that the Government of Kenya have been trying to provide relief food, but they do not have nearly enough. Other agencies are spending time interviewing people to find out what the needs are, but on the ground relief is totally inadequate.

#### *Mothers' Union's financial outlay for the crisis*

- £114,000 is a wholly unprecedented amount for us and extremely difficult for a charity of Mothers' Union's size (total income around £3m p/a).
- We have had to reallocate funds from other projects. We are at the end of our resources. Under the economic pressures of this year we were already spreading things thin, but the needs are so severe we could not do anything else but send what aid we could to our members in East Africa.
- The lack of media attention on the region, attributed to journalists' 'famine fatigue', has (up until 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2009, the day of writing) made our fundraising for the needs particularly hard. Even other charities seem to be hardly mentioning the crisis (again, thus far – they are now starting to publicise it a little). We are struggling to raise enough attention to fundraise successfully, even with such desperate stories coming out of the region through our members.

#### *How we distribute aid on the ground in East Africa*

- Mothers' Union distribution of relief aid is uniquely grassroots: our local, indigenous Mothers' Union groups take the aid to their own neighbours and communities across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It is direct and locally-run.
- There are no overheads because we do not send in foreign aid workers. This also means nothing is lost in translation, and the needs are thoroughly understood because our own local Kenya people, of every tribal and ethnic background and language, distribute aid.
- Kenya's total Mothers' Union membership is 114,000 individuals, spread across all of rural and urban Kenya.
- Tanzania's Mothers' Union membership is 754,000 people.
- Uganda's Mothers' Union membership is 140,000.
- All of these 1,008,000 Mothers' Union members are spread across the whole geographical area and population of their countries, owing to the grassroots growth of Mothers' Union over the last 80 years in the East Africa region.