

HUNGER CRISIS



In drought-stricken Nicaragua, a hungry crowd clamors for food supplied by Food For The Poor before it runs out.

Aura Herrera doesn't have much to be thankful for. She and her four children live in a black plastic tent and sleep on a piece of plastic on the dirt. Her children often cry from hunger. But Aura's faith allows her to survive the pain of seeing her children slowly starve. Her faith is there even when the food is not and her children cry for something to eat.

"The children beg, 'Mama, can we get some food?' I tell them, 'You have to be strong because there's nothing I can do,'" she said.

"I have hope and faith that God will give us our daily bread. I have faith in Him and give thanks even when the bread doesn't come daily," said Aura.

The famine in northern Nicaragua, where Aura lives, has reached a critical stage. Drought, a continuing coffee crisis and food prices that doubled in the past

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three months have taken their toll. More than 14 have died from starvation in the past month in Nicaragua alone, and many more have died in neighboring countries.

One grandmother, Santiago Murilla, fears her 15-month-old grandson will die if he falls sick because he is so malnourished. "When the children cry because they are hungry, all I can do is cry along with them, because I have nothing to give them to eat," she said.

Magnitude of Crisis Confirmed

A new report by the United Nations warns that a hunger crisis has affected 8.6 million people in Central America. Worst affected are the poorest rural areas in southern Guatemala, northern Nicaragua and south of Honduras to El Salvador. The UN found several communities suffering

from the string of disasters plaguing Central America these past few years — from hurricanes to earthquakes to a coffee crisis — leaving severe food shortages. In Nicaragua alone, food prices have increased while jobs have dwindled. For the poor who struggle to earn less than one dollar a day, this is a disaster in itself.

"I worry about finding food for my baby, but when you don't have it, you have no choice. I worry about her constantly, but I can't do anything about it," says Maritza Rodriguez, 24, of her 15-month-old daughter, Giselle. Giselle's hair

is falling out from malnutrition and protein deficiency.

Many families have drifted down from the major coffee-producing areas in the mountains, as jobs are gone now. Coffee prices are at the lowest they've been in 100 years, forcing farmers to reduce their crops and leaving no work for generations of coffee pickers.

Two years ago, the Herrera family moved from the coffee plantation to a small slum in Matagalpa. At least 220 families have moved from the mountains to the slums in the past two years. Desperate for work and food, they wait... and pray... and hope.

"I ask God to give me strength and provide us with our daily bread," said Ernesta Herrera, 27.

"Life was better in the mountains because we used to work in the coffee haciendas. But now there is no work. My children cry because they are hungry. All I can do is ask God to give them strength to hold on," said Herrera whose 5-year-old son, Victor, weighs only 30 pounds.

You Can Make a Difference

As followers of Christ, we often read the headlines and wonder how we can help.

God's word commands us to help those in need. "If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?" (1 John 3:17)