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KENYAN CHILDREN NEED EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

Kenyan children affected by the famine in that country do need support, but assistance must be provided in consultation with Kenyan communities according to Executive Director of Save the Children New Zealand, John Bowis.

Mr Bowis was responding to the news today that a New Zealand dog food manufacturer is sending dehydrated food over to Kenya.

"The association with dog food is clearly unfortunate, but to be fair, the idea of providing assistance to a very serious famine affecting over 2.5 million Kenyan people was probably motivated by real concern for the children involved.

"The experience of agencies like Save the Children is that sending food products from New Zealand is not cost efficient and because of freight cost, can be ineffective due to local children not being used to different food. The other problem is that dried food products require water but there is a water shortage in Kenya, which is likely to mean villagers may be mixing this food with contaminated water and that is a definite health risk. We do not want to encourage the use of unclean water to rehydrate this product.

"Save the Children is currently working with some affected Kenyan communities to assess their needs and coordinate with other agencies to get the best results for children in Kenya. It would usually be best to source food from the region to keep costs down, and to contribute to the local economy.

"In the long term, we need to continue to improve water supply and water quality, to provide seed for replanting and work on early warning systems for famine and drought in this area.

"It's also important that children in Kenya are treated with the same respect, and given the same rights, as children in New Zealand," John Bowis said.

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