

West Africa Food Crisis

30 May 2012

Context

Two years on from the last crisis in the Sahel region of West Africa, food insecurity is again growing daily, affecting people in Niger, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Senegal. An emergency is likely to affect more than 18.4 million people – a similar number to those affected in the recent Horn of Africa crisis.

Key Points

- Large areas of the Sahel are entering a state of humanitarian emergency. In Northern Mali, this is further complicated by insecurity. The latest estimate¹ from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is that £970m of aid is required in total, of which £659m is required for food security and nutrition alone.
- In spite of this, just half of the money has been mobilised to date.² An African Union (AU)-led pledging conference has been discussed, but as yet no firm date has been given.

World Vision UK's calls on the UK Government:

- To consider the UK's financial contribution and to urge other governments and multi-lateral institutions to commit funding
- To support an AU-led formal agreement on the needs of the people in the Sahel.
- To scale up funding of interventions to address hunger and malnutrition, especially targeting children under two, and pregnant and breastfeeding women
- To increase support for cash transfers and appropriate food assistance to help families in meeting their basic needs.
- To stay engaged with long term strategies that prevent this predictable, cyclical crisis from happening again ('building resilience').
- To ensure that adequate funding is ring-fenced for child protection programmes and that child protection considerations are integrated into all responses to the crisis.
- In the short term, to ensure any immediate humanitarian response focuses not just on saving lives, but on re-establishing livelihoods.
- In the longer term, to ensure that DFID's emergency response funds are accessible in the early stages of a crisis to protect livelihoods and lobby for multilateral funds to do the same.

¹ <http://ochaonline.un.org/UrgencesEmergencies/Sahel2012/FundingSahel2012/tabid/7801/language/fr-FR/Default.aspx>

² Latest funding figures - http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=search-reporting_display&CQ=cq290512170526Qc2H3mljif

Situation Overview

- What started as a cyclical crisis in the West African Belt has this year hit the most vulnerable countries in the region earlier and harder than normally, especially Niger, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal.
- A deadly combination of low rainfall, rising food prices and declining food supplies of the poorest households was affecting more than 18.4 million people, even before the traditional 'hungry' season (between March and August) began.
- World Vision is particularly concerned about the high numbers of children under the age of five affected:
 - 1.3 million children are facing³ severe acute malnutrition. 3 million children are at risk of moderate acute malnutrition.
 - The level of severe acute malnutrition, which greatly increases the risk of child mortality, is already 3 times higher than the previous data collected by the Government of Niger (in December 2011), and as high as the 2010 crisis even though the peak of this crisis is still some months away.
 - Children who suffer from moderate acute malnutrition have about 2.5 times the risk of dying than a well nourished child if they don't receive treatment. This increases to about 9 times the odds if they suffer from severe acute malnutrition.
- This is already one of the poorest areas in the world: Niger ranks 136 of 137 on the Human Development Index.
- Grain prices are reported to have gone up between 30% and 60% compared with the end of November 2011. In comparison with the five-year average, prices are 30-40% higher in Niger and Chad, and 50-60% higher in Mali and Burkina Faso. Given that food accounts for 80% of the expenditure of the most vulnerable groups, this impact will be widespread.
- Violence and wider events in Libya, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Northern Mali⁴ have reduced regional employment opportunities. The migrant workers of Niger have had to return home. The clashes in Mali have also led to thousands fleeing the country for Niger (currently estimated at 11,000 by the World Food Programme, Sahel Crisis Update No.5). They have settled in the region of Tillabery, one of the areas worst affected by food shortages in Niger.
- The situation is expected to deteriorate until the next harvest, around September 2012. But without early preventive action (for example to stop households eating seed stocks essential for planting), and support for people to get back on their feet, this crisis will continue to repeat itself.

The cyclical nature of the crisis

- The emerging scenario in the Sahel underlines the chronic and ongoing nature of food insecurity in the region. Even in a normal year, acute child malnutrition rates in the Sahel region are frequently over the internationally accepted emergency threshold of 15%. 50% of children under-five suffer chronic malnutrition and 300,000 children die from malnutrition-related causes.⁵
- Droughts and food shortages are not uncommon, but they used to be separated by longer periods, which allowed communities time to recover their means of livelihood (crops,

³ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/News/west-africa-sahel-food-crisis-anthony-lake/>

⁴ See, for example, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/qa-whats-the-humanitarian-impact-of-the-conflict-in-northern-mali>

⁵ IVCA presentation to the World Food Programme's meeting on the Sahel, 15/2/12

livestock) and build their resilience. This year's crisis comes just two years after the 2009-2010 crisis, which occurred five years after the 2004-2005 crisis.

- Despite this, the funding from international donors tends to be spent on short-term answers. Insufficient attention is focused on integrated programmes that recognise the ongoing chronic and cyclical nature of this crisis and work with communities to prevent it from happening again. Responses to previous crises have focused on the immediate humanitarian need, rather than building 'resilience', preparedness and tackling the drivers of risk.
- In the short term, the UK government, both directly and through the International Community, should ensure any immediate humanitarian response (the UK has already contributed £10million) focuses not just on saving lives, but on re-establishing livelihoods. For example, food distribution or provision for refugees should be coupled with mechanisms to enhance sustainable farming.
- In the longer term, the UK government should ensure that DFID's emergency response funds are accessible in the early stages of a crisis to protect livelihoods and lobby for multilateral funds to do the same. For example, lots of emergency funds (like the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) cannot intervene in the early stages, only when a full blown crisis has emerged. Instead of protecting and sustaining people's livelihoods, crops and cattle, the international community waits until their jobs have gone, and their crops and cattle have died. This means, even if they are fed through the crisis, they have no life to go back to.

Donor response

- The Governments of Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Chad have called for assistance from the international community.
- Donors and agencies have heeded the lessons learned from the Horn of Africa Crisis, and reacted to the early warning signs. As of 23rd February, over US\$400 million had been pledged to respond to food insecurity, drought and nutrition needs in the Sahel, whereas at the same point in 2010 donors were doing almost nothing.
- Countries and multilaterals that have pledged more than 1 million dollars, according to the UN, are listed in Table I overleaf.

Table 1:

Country / Organisation	Contribution (\$USD millions)
USA	232.54
ECHO (European Commission)	136.17
CERF (United Nations)	62.58
Canada	41.89
France	22.75
Japan	22.19
Germany	18.45
UK	14.06
Multilateral contribution to WFP	10.87
Australia	10.84
Switzerland	9.12
Sweden	8.9
Finland	7.6
Luxembourg	4.02
Denmark	3.71
Spain	3.02
Ireland	1.68
Netherlands ⁶	1.2

About World Vision

World Vision is a child-focused Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities in almost 100 countries worldwide to overcome poverty and injustice, with support from over 100,000 child sponsors in the UK alone. World Vision has a particular focus on child health, child protection, and humanitarian relief, last year contributing to 10 disaster responses, including the Horn of Africa Food Crisis.

For Further Information

This briefing is provided by the World Vision UK Government Relations Team to assist MPs and Peers in promoting in Parliament issues which affect children in poverty. For further information, or to discuss any issues in this briefing please contact:

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⁶ <http://reliefweb.int/node/499311>