

The food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel threatens to affect millions of people. In addition to the reduction in agropastoral production, aggravating factors include high and rising food prices and the short recovery period since the last drought in 2010, leaving people with limited coping mechanisms. Price trends and levels are highly unusual, especially in Mali. Malnutrition rates are generally high across the Sahel, particularly affecting children under two, and generally rise each lean season. It is very clear based on previous food crises in the region that particular food security problems in the lean season lead to significant peaks in acute malnutrition and mortality, taking it beyond critical levels.

WFP has been setting up preparedness and response strategies across the region. In Niger, WFP continues to implement life-saving activities scaled up since November alongside ongoing activities; in Mali and Mauritania, emergency operations are being finalised. In other affected countries, discussions on specific scale-up needs are ongoing with governments and partners.

Highlights

- **Over 460,000 people were provided with support in Niger since November as part of the scale-up through WFP's food-for-work and cash-for-work activities.** Blanket supplementary feeding in support of children aged 6-23 months and lactating women is starting in February in Tillaberi (highest acute malnutrition rates) and in other regions in April. Depending on the vulnerability assessment results expected to be released shortly, WFP may further refine its strategy and response.
- **WFP is supporting Governments in finalising food security assessments to refine response plans across the region.** Assessments are at various levels of completion, namely the Mauritania and Mali market assessments which were finalised, as well as the Niger vulnerability assessment that has been finalised with support from WFP and partners and is now awaiting official endorsement. In addition, joint food security and market assessment missions are being conducted this week, led by CILSS and with the participation of WFP and other partners in 5 countries.
- **WFP strives to have commodities available to ensure a rapid response.** WFP is exploring various measures to rapidly acquire commodities to ensure timely implementation of planned activities. The Forward Purchase Facility has been activated for the region and some 31,700 mt of assorted commodities are being procured. This will significantly reduce lead times since most commodities are being procured on international markets. Funding is urgently required to enable operations to request these commodities and make them available in the country when required. The timely availability of commodities will be a key factor in enabling WFP to provide life-saving support for the most vulnerable during the lean season.
- **WFP is monitoring the evolving situation in Nigeria.** Continuing high fuel prices could impact the fuel, transport and commodity prices in neighbouring countries, and hence impact procurement opportunities and operational costs for WFP's response in the Sahel. Since the removal of fuel subsidies, fuel prices have doubled in Nigeria and on the Niger black market.

Update on situation and WFP response

Countries affected so far are Niger, Mauritania, Chad and Mali. Other countries of concern include Senegal and Burkina Faso, where WFP is working with the government to assess the situation. Northern parts of Cameroon and Nigeria may also be of concern.

WFP has been working with Governments and partners in assessing the situation across the affected countries, and in some countries has already set up preparedness and response plans. Market and operational cost indicators will be monitored starting 2012 to determine the scope of cash vs. food interventions.

NIGER

- In line with the Government's response plan issued in October, WFP has scaled up cash and food-for-work activities and is expanding nutrition interventions focusing on preventive and treatment activities through a recently approved budget revision of the ongoing protracted relief and recovery operation.
- The budget revision increased the budget from US\$100.6 million to US\$164.4 million, and increased the number of beneficiaries from 2.2 million to 3.3 million people.
- Over 460,000 people were provided with support in Niger since November as part of this scale-up through food-for-work and cash-for-work activities. Blanket supplementary feeding in support of children aged 6-23 months and lactating women is starting in February in Tillaberi (highest acute malnutrition rates) and in other regions in April. Following the release of the vulnerability assessment WFP's strategy and response may be further adjusted.
- Alongside the scale-up plans, ongoing nutritional activities (treatment of moderate acute malnutrition) are implemented throughout more than 800 CRENAMs (centres for nutritional recovery) in 8 regions.
- In Niger, millet prices are well above the five-year average. In Maradi and Zinder which are usually surplus-producing parts of the country, prices are up by 54% and 32% respectively. The Government has placed its estimated national cereal deficit at 519,639 metric tons (13.9% of national consumption requirements) and fodder deficit at 10,222,308 metric tons (50% of needs).

MAURITANIA

- On 24 November 2011, the Government of Mauritania launched the Plan EMEL (Hope) and declared that it is planning to provide livestock fodder and subsidized cereal sales through government shops to people affected by food insecurity.
- WFP is in the final stages for the approval of an emergency operation to support the implementation of the Government Plan, aiming to support over 380,000 people. A recent market assessment has confirmed a severe problem of food access, as coarse grain prices have sharply risen in the south of the country. Drought affected households are selling off their animals which leads to a drastic drop in livestock prices. These factors are undermining households' access to food.
- According to a recent market assessment, Mauritania is facing a widespread food access crisis. The substantial increase in grain prices, combined with low incomes from the sale of livestock, is eroding agro-pastoralists purchasing power.
- Results from a food security assessment are currently being finalised and will assist in further refining operational plans.

MALI

- In line with the Government national action plan launched in November in response to the drought, WFP is finalizing an emergency operation to support almost 800,000 beneficiaries until December 2012 (number of beneficiaries pending review/approval). The government response plan would incorporate food distribution, nutrition supplementation, food-for-work programmes and replenishing the national strategic food stocks.
- A joint food security assessment is currently being analysed.
- Coarse grain prices increased dramatically between October and December, and stabilised by the end of the December at high levels. Compared to average, large increases are noted in Gao, Segou, Bamako (Gao 92%, Segou 85%, Bamako 77%). A recent WFP market assessment has indicated that millet and sorghum have become scarce in the markets of Bamako and Kayes.

CHAD

- The Government of Chad appealed for international assistance on 21 December 2011; WFP is in close discussion with the Government on the response and will scale-up its current activities accordingly.
- A national emergency food security assessment is ongoing, and a market assessment was launched in early January 2012.

- Preliminary results from a recent nutrition survey in the Sahelien band of the country show that levels of acute malnutrition were at a “critical” level in 6 out of 11 regions surveyed and over the 10 percent prevalence threshold considered “serious” in all areas. It is expected that this situation will deteriorate if the food security situation does not improve. Furthermore, affected areas in the Sahel strip are still recovering from the 2009-2010 food and nutrition crisis.
- In these already high levels of malnutrition, a crop production deficit compounded by high prices poses a serious challenge. During the 2011 crop production season, there has been a reduction in production (- 43% compared to 2010 and - 13% compared to 5-year average). In the southern part of the country which is still recovering from the 2009/2010 food and nutrition crisis, the current price levels are above both the five-year average and the ones of September 2010. The net deficit is placed at 455,000 mt, which is likely to pose a serious food availability issue in Chad.
- Prices are 50% above the 5-year average in the surplus producing area of Bol, and 28% above average in the capital Ndjaména.

BURKINA FASO

- According to the Government, 146 communes (representing 41 % of all communes) are said to be at risk of food insecurity.
- WFP is extending its current protracted relief and recovery operation until May 2012 to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable women and children. Activities will focus on the three most vulnerable regions and will prioritize nutrition activities.
- Meanwhile, WFP is in discussion with the Government on the specific response to the food and nutrition crisis. A Government-led assessment is being launched in which WFP is participating.
- Similar to neighbouring countries, Burkina Faso experienced a cereal harvest deficit, which was 16 % less than last year and 1 % less than the 5-year average, with a sharper decrease in millet and sorghum production respectively 18% and 3% less than the 5-year average. It is important to note that, despite the 1% decrease of cereal production (below the 5 year average), aggregate figures mask disparities (rice vs. coarse grain as well as regional disparities). For instance, millet production has decreased by 18% compared to the five year average. In addition to that, rising food prices are of concern. Latest reports indicate that millet has increased by 72% compared to the five-year average in Ouagadougou markets. This renders access to food for already vulnerable households increasingly difficult, and may further stretch coping mechanisms.

SENEGAL

- Initial indications reveal that the situation is serious in several areas where the lean season may start earlier than usual caused by a significant harvest reduction compounded by high food prices.
- Prices in Kaolack are 60% above last year, and 32% above the 5 year average. So far, price of rice has remained stable.
- A recently finalised food security assessment will provide required information on the needs. Initial indications on a specific number of people in need are being reviewed to enable a response.
- WFP has been working closely with the Government on the assessment and consecutively on a possible response strategy.

Resource Update

Donor contributions are being sought urgently in order to prepare for a rapid response in support of Government plans. Landlocked countries in the region face long lead-times, hence the need for immediate availability of funds and commodities. WFP is adopting measures including advance financing, forward purchase facility, regional procurement where possible to reduce lead times.

Contributions to the Sahel response amount to US\$30.1 million: WFP acknowledges contributions from Belgium, Germany, ECHO, CERF, Luxembourg and US FFP. In addition, multilateral allocations were made to Niger and Burkina Faso.

France has pledged a contribution of Euro 10 million to the 5 Sahel countries; in addition, discussions with other donors are ongoing for contributions towards Mauritania, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. As soon as the two emergency operations for Mali (preliminary requirements pending review and approval amount to US\$53.8 million) and Mauritania (US\$ 29.7 million) are approved, contributions will be required rapidly to speed up procurement and deliveries. Potential plans for Chad, Burkina Faso and Senegal are being worked on.

In the case of Niger, the budget revision of the ongoing PRRO increased the budget from US\$100.6 million to US\$164.4 million, and increased the number of beneficiaries from 2.2 million to 3.3 million people. Resourcing gaps amount to US\$88 million; rapid contributions are therefore crucial in making sure food is in place when needed. In addition, the results of the vulnerability assessment may lead to a review of WFP's strategy, hence increasing the requirements.

Anticipated pipeline breaks coincide with the beginning of the lean season when the country office will need to scale up beyond what has already been planned. This means that there is a very short window of opportunity to buy and transport required food commodities.

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