

NIGER

Situation

A devastating silent crisis is affecting Niger, where one in five children presently dies before the age of five. Niger ranks 176th out of 177 countries in the UNDP 2004 Human Development Index. A tragic combination of rapid population growth, desertification, a locust infestation of biblical proportions, rain shortfalls and the socio-economic impact of crises in the subregion has affected 3.6 million people (out of a population of 12 million) of which 2.7 million are extremely vulnerable and require food assistance. Children and pregnant and lactating women are the most at risk:

- 32,000 severely malnourished children
- 160,000 moderately malnourished children
- 261,360 vulnerable pregnant and lactating women



On 10 July, the National Committee for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises reported that 11 zones had been identified as extremely critical in Tahoua, Tera, G. Roundji, Diffa, Technita, Tillaberi, Ouallam and Illela regions. These are part of 56 vulnerable zones of concern out of 106 that are monitored on a monthly basis.

Key Facts

- The revised Flash Appeal, launched on 8 August 2005, seeks US\$ 80.9 million for an extended period up till December 2005. As of 17 August, the appeal is 36% funded with **US\$ 29.1 million** received, thus leaving a new shortfall of **US\$ 51.1 million**. Three appealing agencies represent 94% of total Appeal namely WFP (US\$ 57.6 million), UNICEF (US\$ 14.6 million) and FAO (3.9 million).
- Advances from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) have been approved for WHO (US\$ 500,000) and FAO (US\$ 808,000). In order to mobilise resources, on 20 July the ERC wrote to members of the Humanitarian Liaison Working group (HLWG), including traditional donors and non-traditional partners such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Jordan requesting for their support to repay advances from the CERF to humanitarian agencies.
- On 3 August, ERC Jan Egeland appointed the UN Resident Coordinator for Niger [Mr. Michele Falavigna] as Humanitarian Coordinator after endorsement from the IASC.
- Also on 3 August, Niger's President Tanja met with the UNCT to express his concerns about the image of Niger being portrayed by the media as a country with widespread nationwide famine. The President asked for UN support in presenting a fair and honest picture of the situation which he characterized as critical but limited to certain areas and specific vulnerable groups.

- On 4 August the Humanitarian Coordinator endorsed WFP's request for Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) to airlift food supplies for this crisis.
- On 7 August, an Op-ed by ERC Egeland on the crisis in Niger was published by USA Today.

Breakdown of needs

Food Aid

- The Government's National Early Warning system has added some new populations from Agadez region to the list of people in urgent need of food aid and the total number now stands at 2.7 million (from 2.5 million of the Revised Appeal). WFP's emergency operation, which is seeking US\$57.6 million is 43% funded. The current shortfall of US\$32.8 million, corresponds to 43,000 metric tons of food.
- UNICEF needs US\$ 1.8 million to support cereal banks for 164,000 households, including 30,500 children under five.

Health and Nutrition

- UNICEF needs a total of US\$ 11.2 million to provide supplementary and therapeutic feeding to 32,000 severely malnourished children and 160,000 moderately malnourished children under five.
- UNFPA needs US\$ 400,000 for emergency reproductive health assistance targeting 261,360 pregnant and lactating women.
- WHO needs a total of US\$ 1.2 million for emergency health assistance and disease and nutritional surveillance.
- Helen Keller International needs US\$ 531,644 to rehabilitate 21,000 malnourished children under five of whom 6,000 are severely malnourished and 15,000 are moderately malnourished.

Agriculture

- FAO needs US\$ 3.9 million for the emergency provision of (i) animal fodder to 126,000 affected households; (ii) cereal and pulses to 95,000 households; (iii) prophylaxis to 100,000 heads of cattle; as well as, (iv) to launch small scale activities for 11,000 affected households; and (v) undertake emergency agricultural coordination activities.
- VSF-B requires US\$ 530,000 to restock the livestock of most vulnerable pastors.

Water and Sanitation

- UNICEF needs US\$ 1.5 million for the provision of emergency water and sanitation kits to 32,000 affected households.
- ACF needs US\$ 510,000 for the rehabilitation of boreholes targeting 100,000 beneficiaries.

Coordination

- UNDP needs US\$ 700,000 to reinforce the capacity of the national coordination mechanism for the mitigation of the food crisis (DNPGA).
- OCHA needs US\$ 600,000 to support the coordination of humanitarian efforts including enhanced information management and concerted advocacy.
- UNDG needs US\$ 200,000 to support the UNCT in developing appropriate links between longer-term recovery strategies and the humanitarian response.

Humanitarian presence in country

- New partners continue to settling and/or boost their response capacities in Niger. While MSF has mobilised 50 expatriate volunteers and 450 local employees to expand its programme. As of 1

August 2005, the NGO Islamic Relief has established an office in Niamey and has opened five supplementary feeding centers in Diamballa, Kofouno, Namarigongou, Sarakoirra and Famal. The Federation disaster response team arrived in Niamey on 21 July with a team leader and 3 RDRT members and was rapidly followed by the British Red Cross Emergency Response Unit. They join French Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross staff, which were already in-country. Other organizations include the Norwegian Red Cross; the Qatari Red Crescent, IFRC, Save the Children-US, Oxfam-UK, Concern, Réunir, and MSF-Switzerland. Development partners stretching their ongoing programs to cover emergency response activities comprise: World Vision, Care, AFRICARE, CRS, Caritas, and Oxfam-Québec.

- **OCHA** has deployed a team to support the UN Country Team and Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator that includes a Senior Advisor/Team Leader; a Surge Capacity officer supporting the revision of the Flash Appeal and humanitarian assessments; as well as a Public Information Officer and a Protection Officer. A National Liaison Officer and a Database developer have been recruited locally. **UNICEF** has deployed 11 additional staff while 16 additional positions will be filled in coming weeks. **WFP** has 38 international and is recruiting a significant number of national staff. **FAO**, has set up an Emergency Coordination Unit (ECU) composed of an International Emergency coordinator assisted by a team of international and experienced national experts (agronomists and a veterinarian). The ECU is establishing working relationships with the NGOs, rural organizations and village committees, which are part of the National Food Crisis Prevention and Mitigation Mechanism. **WHO** has set up a crisis room within the country office and established an emergency task force composed by a senior international task force coordinator and a team of international and national experts in nutrition, surveillance and health system analysis. **UNFPA** has set up an emergency coordination unit in Niamey and has reinforced its country team with a regional adviser, from Dakar and a national expert in logistics. In view of the increase in UN staff in Niger **UNDP** will enhance its internal staff capacity through the recruitment of a BCPR-funded international expert in the area of crisis prevention and recovery. **UNDSS** has deployed the Regional Field Security Coordination Officer to Niamey.
- OCHA has received a pledge from DFID/ECHO and OFDA for provision of financial support for the establishment of a **Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC)** until December 2005 in order to improve the information management capacity of the humanitarian community. The HIC Manager is already on the ground, a Liaison Officer and a GIS Officer will arrive within a week while a data coordinator is under recruitment. Two additional 2 GIS specialist will be deployed for a period of two weeks by MAPACTION.

Humanitarian response

- The Government of Niger is holding regular coordination meetings but has admitted that many NGOs are absent. In Government views, the establishment of a coordination mechanism like the HIC, will be most helpful to establish synergies.
- Strategic and sectoral meetings have now started and data collection and dissemination can be strengthened accordingly. Life saving working groups have been formed headed by the relevant actors and are covering the sectors of food, nutrition, health, medical cost recovery, water and sanitation. An information working group is also working to ensure a unified media approach on general humanitarian policy issues.

- WFP, the National Food Security Mechanism (DNP-GCA1) and NGO partners are coordinating efforts in order to reach all 2.68 million people including 480,000 children under five and pregnant and lactating women who will receive supplementary food. For the first round of general distributions, WFP food will reach 1.89 million beneficiaries and the rest will be covered by the DNP-GCA or by the NGOs PLAN International and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), who each have their own pipeline. In September, WFP will conduct a second distribution to the 1.7 million most food insecure beneficiaries.
- To date, more than 4,208 moderately malnourished children <5 and their families (approx. 23,144 additional beneficiaries) have been served through Red Cross and Red Crescent supplementary feeding centers (SFCs). Additional SFCs are being added on a daily basis in order to meet the Movement target of serving 24,500 children <5 within the next month.
- An agreement has been reached with WFP that the Federation will take responsibility for managing the distribution of food supplies to approximately 222,972 beneficiaries (31,854 families) in the departments of Tillaberi and Agadez departments over the next month.
- Within the framework of its current programming on food security, **UNDP** has placed at the disposal of local populations, 1005 tonnes of millet worth USD 623,000 from funds mobilised by UNCDF through the *Fonds Belge de Survie (FBS)*. Thanks to BCPR's financial support of U\$100,000, UNDP has focused mainly on reinforcing the capacity of the national crisis coordinating body, le *Dispositif National de Prevention et de gestion des crises* (DNP-GC) both at national and local levels. This support has included the recruitment of three experts – an agricultural economist, an accountant and a statistician. In addition, UNDP has co-financed with OCHA, a Humanitarian Officer to support the UNCT in responding to the crisis. There is a human resources capacity gap in the medical sector, which UNDP in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, WHO, UNFPA and other development partners, intend to fill through the recruitment of 100 local UNV doctors and midwives to alleviate the overload in the medical sector caused by the food crisis. This will be for an initial period of four months up to December 2005.
- The existence of a national food security early warning system can provide a sound picture of the situation if the information is properly managed, analysed. Partnership must be built with those actors in Niamey with a relatively strong GIS capacity in order to avoid duplication and strengthen the capacities already in place which will serve the country's surveillance and information needs beyond the current crisis.
- Relatively good communication systems in place in Niamey for UN agencies and some NGOs which facilitates sharing of information (by email) at national level. In the field, however, telephone coverage is difficult.

Issues and challenges

- The strategy in the revised Flash Appeal for Niger encompasses a three pronged approach: (i) Save lives immediately; (ii) Reduce the level of vulnerability in the immediate future; and (iii) Reinforce the coping mechanisms of affected households by the end of the year. **A key challenge will be to define a platform to ensure constant and meaningful linkages between efforts to address humanitarian needs and initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying structural issues.**

¹ Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises Alimentaires- an institutional mechanism made up of the Government, donors and UN agencies responsible for the management of the national reserves of food and cash.

- In order to get food into WFP is using airlifts from Italy and Cote d'Ivoire, trucks from Burkina Faso and the ports of Lome (Togo) and Cotonou (Benin), trains from Abidjan and inter-country transport from Niamey to the sub-offices. WFP is considering setting up a humanitarian air service (passenger service) to facilitate the travel of humanitarian staff to different parts of the country which are difficult to reach by road. (For example, a trip by road from Niamey to Agadez takes 12 hours or 10 hours from Niamey to Zinder). WFP is also considering a special operation (SO) for augmentation of the Nigeria logistics corridor, to support humanitarian operations in Niger and Chad.
- The international response to the food crisis has developed incredibly rapidly since images of starving children were broadcasted by the media. Representatives of all major humanitarian agencies have been arriving in droves in Niamey, as have journalists from most mainstream media outlets. Due to "CNN effects" there is now a global spotlight on the situation.

OCHA, 18 August 2005