

Background paper – Oslo Humanitarian Conference
Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region
Thematic Session: Food Security

“Humanitarian food assistance to save lives today and secure the future for tomorrow by empowering women, children and youth.”

BACKGROUND

Food and nutrition security in North East Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region

Conflict fueled by socio-economic marginalization over time has caused immense human suffering across North Eastern Nigeria and parts of Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The prolonged humanitarian crisis in the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency has had a devastating impact on food and nutrition security in the region leading to famine-like conditions in some areas. The food system is under severe stress at several levels. Vital infrastructure is destroyed, commercial trade and markets are vastly disrupted and essential services including schools and hospitals are no longer functional. The region was already hard hit by climate-induced disasters like increased drought or desertification, as well as by an overuse of natural resources.

Across North East Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, some seven million people are struggling with food insecurity and need urgent food assistance: 5.1 million in North East Nigeria, 1.5 million in Cameroon, 340,000 in Niger and close to 160,000 in Chad. Food security is expected to deteriorate until at least mid-2017.

According to the multi-stakeholder Cadre Harmonisé Analysis¹ conducted in Nigeria in October 2016, about 5 million people are in crisis and emergency phases of food and nutrition insecurity (IPC phase 3-4), nearly twice as many as in March 2016. This figure is projected to rise to 5.8 million people by June 2017. In the worst affected and least accessible areas of Borno and Yobe States, 55,000 people are estimated to be experiencing famine-like conditions and the figure is projected to increase to 120,000 by June 2017 unless immediate assistance is provided.

Food insecurity is one of the underlying causes of malnutrition and related mortality, which are also critically high. In most of the conflict-affected areas, malnutrition rates have surpassed the emergency threshold of 15 percent Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM). Throughout the region, more than half a million children are severely acutely malnourished (UNICEF). In Nigeria, up to 450,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and reduced immunity to basic illnesses such as malaria in the coming 12 months in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, 300,000 in Borno alone. Almost one in five children suffering severe acute malnutrition (SAM) are likely to die (about 75,000 children) if they do not receive specialized treatment. Many are likely to have died already. There is a lack of service delivery points for malnourished children with medical complications. These children need assistance now.

¹ In West Africa, the Cadre Harmonisé replaces the IPC. It follows similar processes and protocols.

The most affected three states in Nigeria are predominantly sustained by subsistence farming and small scale seasonal dependent agriculture. For a third consecutive year, these livelihoods have been disrupted as people cannot return to the land to cultivate due to threat of attack, risk of unexploded ordinance and improvised explosive devices, military restrictions for fear of Boko Haram infiltration and a lack of agricultural inputs. The IDPs, returnees and vulnerable host communities in these areas will continue to rely on humanitarian food assistance in 2017 and beyond if the security situation does not improve and parallel investment in sustainable livelihoods are not realized where possible.

CHALLENGES

Protection and Humanitarian access

Significant improvements in the food security and nutritional situation are noted in accessible places where an integrated humanitarian response including nutrition, food security, WASH and Health was undertaken. Hence enhancing protection and access to humanitarian assistance is of utmost importance in order to reach all those in need of assistance. There are serious concerns about the protection of vulnerable groups, including women and children living in the inaccessible areas. Large numbers of people are still not receiving humanitarian assistance, due to access constraints. The security situation remains fragile and unpredictable and is likely the most significant impediment to humanitarian access, often requiring military escorts on roads where threats of attack remain high. Humanitarian operations remain a target of Boko Haram raids as sadly shown by recent incidences, the Anti-Tank Mine attack on a food convoy in Borno State and the suicide bombing inside an IDP camp in Maiduguri.

Assisting the most vulnerable requires a clear and implementable operational strategy. The humanitarian community must deploy Rapid Response Teams that are well versed in program, logistics, communications, security and access negotiations. Co-ordinate closely with national and state institutions and advocate for guaranteed open and safe access to the affected population. There is clear evidence from elsewhere that RRTs are successful when there is an absolute and unquestionable need to reach those people facing extreme food insecurity.

Markets disruptions and impact on women, youth and other vulnerable groups

Over time, the conflict and natural disasters have exacerbated household and community vulnerability in North East Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region by destroying livelihoods and disrupting movement of goods and people. This has led to extremely high prices of staple food crops² further hampering people's access to food and a healthy diet.

More than 80 percent of the rural population in the North East depend on crops, livestock and fishing activities. Farming activities have been heavily disrupted by different factors. Over the past few years the involvement of Boko Haram in the looting of harvests, cattle and fish trade around Lake Chad has been widely reported. The restriction of movement, the destruction of infrastructure and the disruption of services have also contributed to the decrease in agricultural production throughout the affected areas. The perturbation of transhumance

² WFP, Lake Chad Basin Crisis, 2016.

flows and livestock markets are also impacting the food security and livelihoods in the four countries, whose local economies are strongly integrated and interdependent around the Lake Chad.

Border closures have also exerted pressure on trade, limiting supply and sale of goods and services.³ These food system flaws, disruptions, and breakages have exacerbated the humanitarian crises and especially impacted women and youth significantly, further aggravating their precarious situation in an armed conflict that is characterized by gender-based violence and livelihoods destruction. Women and girls particularly are often the first to reduce their food intake, with negative repercussions for their nutrition and health—especially when women are pregnant or lactating, leading to increased nutritional needs for themselves and their children.

When a humanitarian response enhances women and youth participation in food systems, there are both immediate and long-term benefits. Across the four countries women play an important role as traders, producers, processors and retailers, yet they are often poorly integrated in the value chain. While between 60 to 79 percent of the rural work force are women, men are five times more likely to own land. In a study in North East Nigeria and around the Lake Chad from 2015, 40 percent of women cited the physical lack of access to markets as the main barrier to participating in economic activities.⁴

OPPORTUNITIES

The success of the humanitarian response will depend on (1) how quickly the humanitarian situation is tackled now to stabilize and improve food and nutrition security over the next 10-12 months; and (2) capitalize on opportunities for recovery and development with special emphasis on women, children and young adults.

It is paramount that immediate food assistance and nutrition support is provided to the affected people. Where ever possible, concrete measures should be undertaken to ensure that affected people can revive their livelihood activities including agricultural production to contribute towards their short and the long-term food security and nutritional wellbeing.

Women, children, and youth are the most affected requiring the greatest attention during the relief efforts. They also deserve attention as agents of vigorous, sustained, and inclusive future economic growth. Humanitarian assistance must address food and nutrition insecurities but can also contribute to strengthen local food systems, reviving trade and markets and increasing household resilience to future shocks, and contributing to overall community development by investing in human and social capital necessary for the advancement of the local communities.

The following are only some of the opportunities that can be realized through humanitarian response:

³ FEWSNET Assessment Nigeria, WFP VAM Regional Assessment.

⁴ UN Women and IFORD Situation of Women and Girls Facing the Humanitarian Crisis Generated by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, 2015

1. Strengthen Rapid Response mechanisms to assist people in hard to reach locations. Recognize that food security response is part of a broader lifesaving response including nutrition, WASH and health interventions.
2. Deploy market based humanitarian response options like cash and voucher wherever feasible, specifically to reach and empower vulnerable women.
3. Design the humanitarian response to enhance women's participation in food markets to take advantage of multiplier effects that cash and voucher based transfers generate to specifically promote women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship.
4. Within the food assistance response, use small-holder friendly procurement modalities by focusing on crops traditionally grown by women and youth to enhance their participation in market initiatives.
5. Where possible, empower women and youth and their organization through the provision of technical and organizational skills, critical inputs, small-scale agro processing units, alternative source of energy, improved access to credit and services as well as by supporting their inclusion in local governance processes and private sector development.
6. Strengthening information systems to assess and monitor the situation of women, children and youth for enhanced advocacy to address their specific needs
7. Invest further in innovative tools, fast tracked smallholder agriculture production and small scale livelihoods activities to boost production, strengthen market systems, and cross-border trade.

KEY ASKS

- (1) Demand protection and humanitarian access to ensure that all vulnerable households in need of urgent humanitarian assistance are reached safely on a regular basis. This includes the strengthening of the Rapid Response Teams.
- (2) Put food security and nutrition at the heart of the humanitarian response with a special focus on women, children and youth. Increase advocacy for the needs of women and children.
- (3) Respond to the urgent need for coordinated support to food assistance and agriculture based livelihood to boost production and markets during the June 2017 rainy season with a special focus women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship.

While providing humanitarian assistance, strengthen resilience of the affected people where feasible to help address the symptoms and structural consequences of food insecurity, malnutrition and unemployment in the region.