Issue brief

Sahel food crisis / Geneva / 14 February 2012

Urgent need to address funding shortfall for acute needs in the Sahel

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is concerned that the emerging humanitarian crisis in the Sahel is underfunded because, as was the case in the Horn of Africa, early warnings of a humanitarian catastrophe are going unheeded. IFRC is urging donors to come the aid of the Sahel but also to invest in longer term resilience to break the cycle of chronic food shortages in the region.

The situation today

- International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) estimates between 10 and 14 million people are currently affected but that the number could climb as high as the 23 million flagged by the EU in January if the crisis is not averted quickly.
- Chronic levels of poverty and malnutrition - 51% of the rural population of the region live ‘on the edge of crisis’.
- Food prices in the region up between 35% and 85% on the past five years due to demand, availability and cross border tensions affecting trade.
- Urgent need to avert the crisis worsening as populations head towards an extended ‘lean season’ by scaling up assessment of vulnerability, particularly in remote areas.
- IFRC emergency appeals focus on food distribution but also on supporting livelihoods, agricultural activity and disaster risk reduction to invest in longer term solutions that build local capacities and therefore, resilience.

Background

Several countries in the Sahel region (including Niger, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal) are again experiencing food insecurity due to poor harvests caused by a combination of failed rains, pest attacks and localised flooding. Chad has a harvest deficit of 50% this year and Mauritania of 52%.

The region was hit by a series of droughts and subsequent food crises in 1973, 1984, 2004/5 and 2009/10. This has resulted in the erosion of coping mechanisms and has left the regional population more vulnerable than ever before as they face a crisis on a scale that they have not experienced before. There are several other complicating factors contributing to the scale of this looming crisis including:

- a drop in remittances from family working abroad after the conflicts in North Africa and Cote d’Ivoire forced people to return home
- Refugees fleeing violence in northern Mali and other localised violence
- environmental degradation (Lake Chad is silting up)
- rapid population growth.
Red Cross Red Crescent response

- Responding to acute needs but also focusing on building longer term resilience to address the chronic situation.
- Mobilizing humanitarian network with Red Cross and Red Crescent teams from countries including France, Spanish, Ireland, Qatar, Monaco, Andorra and Luxembourg supporting local Red Cross operations.
- Mali Red Cross providing strong response leadership in their communities as violence drives refugees in the north over the border.
- IFRC providing coordination support in the region and in country.
- Emergency appeals focus on both emergency food distribution and supporting livelihoods, agricultural activity and income generation and disaster risk reduction measures.

OVERVIEW OF IFRC EMERGENCY APPEALS AND FUNDING FOR SAHEL

- **Niger**: Emergency Appeal: CHF 3,756,836 to help 350,000 people at risk.
- **Mauritania**: Emergency Appeal: CHF 2,131,749 to support 10,000 households.
- **Mali**: Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) allocation: CHF 174,092 for 8,200 people.
- **Burkina Faso**: DREF allocation CHF 113,532 to support 5,500 people.
- **Senegal**: DREF CHF 166,428 for 1000 households.
- **Chad**: Emergency Appeal (yet to be launched) CHF 2,280,878 for 12,300 people.

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