The food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel threatens to affect over 10 million people, out of which the World Food Programme (WFP) plans to assist around 8.8 million people with food and nutrition assistance until the end of 2012. In addition to the reduction in food and fodder production, aggravating factors include high food prices and little time to recover from the last drought in 2009/2010, leaving people with limited coping mechanisms. Malnutrition rates, particularly affecting children under two, are generally high in the Sahel, and usually rise during the lean season. It is well known that food insecurity during the lean season leads to significant peaks in acute malnutrition and mortality, taking it beyond critical levels. In close collaboration with Governments and partners, WFP has been setting up preparedness and response strategies across the region over the past months. While WFP's Regional Response Framework outlines the pillars of our regional preparedness, WFP's operational response is implemented through ongoing and new projects in the affected countries. The Regional Response Framework will be updated and aligned with WFP's projects in the respective countries by the end of March 2012. The revised document will also outline the logistical support to the crisis response, which WFP provides through a new regional operation, augmenting the regional logistics capacities, as well as the humanitarian air services (UNHAS) in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania.

**Highlights**

**WFP's current response in the drought affected areas:**

While scaling up operations to reach 8.8 million beneficiaries during the lean season, WFP currently addresses the needs of approximately 1.7 million drought-affected beneficiaries; for example in Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso. Under WFP's phased approach to the crisis response, the bulk of beneficiaries will be reached during the peak of the crisis from June to September 2012. WFP's needs for the 2012 regional response to the Sahel Crisis amount to over 500,000 mt. In order to address these requirements, WFP is pursuing all purchase options in parallel (regional and international purchase, in-kind, cash, and twinning) to ensure that commodities arrive in time and, at the same time, do not distort local markets.

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**Additional resources are urgently required:**

WFP is grateful for the donor community’s support to the Sahel Crisis response since December 2011. However, additional resources are urgently required, given long lead times and the upcoming rainy season hampering access in many parts of the regions. Further contributions are needed immediately in order to allow WFP to carry out the required large scale procurement and shipping of commodities. Current shortfalls amount to USD 603.2 million or 75% as compared to the Regional Response Framework needs.
Impact of and response to the Mali situation:

WFP is closely monitoring the evolving security situation in Northern Mali and the impact on neighbouring countries. Fighting between Tuareg rebel forces and the Malian army in Northern Mali forced over 175,000 Malians to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of Mali or neighbouring countries. The arrival of a large number of refugees to the already food insecure and drought-stricken regions risks to further exacerbate the already volatile food security situation of host communities. WFP is therefore working with Governments and partners to assess the needs, and to establish response plans under existing or new projects.

- **Mali**: According to ICRC, over 94,000 people are currently displaced within Mali. Of particular concern are unaccompanied children who have been separated from their families during the fighting. Together with the Government, UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), WFP is assessing the needs of the internally displaced. Currently, there is little food available in the markets, and prices are more than double as compared to last year. WFP is ready to support the displaced from prepositioned stocks. To respond to the refugees’ needs, WFP has requested internally transferred commodities from the ongoing Country Programme. A draft budget revision to the drought emergency operation, taking into account the needs of the displaced, is being finalized.

- **Burkina Faso**: So far, over 21,500 refugees have arrived in Burkina Faso; according to UNHCR’s initial assessments, it is estimated that up to 25,000 refugees in need of humanitarian assistance could potentially cross into Burkina Faso over the coming weeks. WFP has, as a first response, provided food assistance to almost 10,000 refugees. Under a new immediate response emergency operation, WFP supports up to 25,000 refugees and 7,500 vulnerable host families with food assistance for a period of three months. WFP is preparing for a general food distribution to over 21,500 refugees and 6,100 host population members next week. 885 mt of maize grain is contracted for milling with a local miller in Ouagadougou, and first batches of 120 mt have already been delivered and pre-positioned in Dori. WFP distributed close to 7 mt of mixed commodities to 233 refugee households on 9 March 2012, while UNHCR distributed kitchen sets to the same target group installed in a site in Ouagadougou.

- **Niger**: The Government estimates that more than 35,000 refugees have crossed over from Mali and have settled in northern areas of Tillabéri at the moment. Populations are registered by local committees, while immediate food relief is provided by the Government and its partners, including WFP. WFP is now covering the food needs of 28,500 Mali refugees/returnees in Tillaberi and Tahoua regions.

- **Mauritania**: At the moment, over 36,950 refugees from Mali have sought refuge in Mauritania. The situation of the Malian refugees is worrisome, as they are arriving in the most food insecure areas of Mauritania. Populations are increasing at 600-1,000 refugees per day and have maintained this rhythm since January 2012. WFP has set up an immediate response emergency operation to support up to 22,000 refugees during the next three months with life-saving food assistance. A scale-up is already underway in order to support the additional caseload. In addition, WFP Mauritania is opening a temporary sub-office in Nema to assist with food distributions and monitoring in Fassala and Bassikounou.
**NIGER**

- Findings of the vulnerability assessment communicated by the Government in January indicated that in January 2012, 1.9 million people were estimated to be severely food insecure (12%) and 4.2 million moderate (27%). This situation is expected to worsen during the next three months, as households exhaust their food stocks and develop negative coping strategies. It is hence projected that by April, which is the beginning of the lean season, 3.5 million persons may be severely food insecure and 2.9 million moderately food insecure.

- The Government of Niger has now launched the first round of subsidized cereal sales, contributing to a general stabilization of food prices on local markets. However, vulnerable households continue to rely on negative coping mechanisms, most notably migration and very poor food consumption, both in terms of quantity and quality. In Tillabéri/Dosso and Zinder, there are reports of communities having already exhausted their cereal stocks, and are now adopting negative coping mechanisms, including for example migration of entire families to Libya and Nigeria, leading to withdrawal of children from schools, and consumption of lower quality foods. However, in areas where cash and food-for-work activities are implemented, there is a notably lower migration rate as compared to other regions.

- In line with the initial support plan issued by the Government in October, WFP had scaled up cash and food-for-work activities and nutrition interventions as early as November through a budget revision of the ongoing protracted relief and recovery operation. The operation will now be aligned with the new emergency operation.

- The emergency operation, “Saving lives and preventing acute malnutrition for crisis-affected and displaced populations in Niger” (April-September 2012) has been early released. It aims at meeting the seasonal acute food and nutrition needs during the 2012 lean season, with a special focus on children under two. The operation plans for a significant cash component, representing 35% of planned beneficiaries; areas to benefit from cash transfers have been carefully selected, based on past, present and future projected trends on market functioning, availability, and prices. Cash transfers will allow for a cost effective and timely response to the crisis. The operation also includes unconditional food relief for Malian refugees and Nigerian returnees fleeing insecurity in northern Mali, as well as their host communities.

- WFP is getting ready to launch the first round of blanket supplementary feeding in Tillaberi for 47,000 registered lactating women and children under 2; the activity will be further scaled up under the emergency operation in April to reach 530,000 beneficiaries: 816 mt of Super Cereal have already arrived in Lomé, as well as 1,040 mt in Cotonou. These quantities are now transported from the ports to Niger.

- The United Nation Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in Niger facilitates the movement of the humanitarian community in Niger and within the region to targeted populations in areas affected by insecurity, as well as to ensure air capacity for prompt evacuation of staff members to Niamey or abroad in case of medical or security problems. Upon request from the humanitarian community in Mali, which has been facing access problems to the north-eastern part of the country due to security concerns, UNHAS Niger will expand its operations to this region in 2012. This service has been requested by over 70 humanitarian agencies and the donor community currently operating in Niger, and 20 in Mali. In 2012, UNHAS plans to maintain the fleet of 2 aircraft. Both possess a short take-off and landing capacity, and are based strategically in Niamey. UNHAS Niger transports 1,500 passengers and 5 mt of cargo monthly.

**CHAD**

- High malnutrition rates particularly affecting children under two remains a serious issue in Chad. 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%
prevalence threshold considered “serious” in all areas. It is expected that this situation will deteriorate if the food security situation does not improve.

- Price monitoring indicates that coarse grain prices have been on the rise, as affected areas in the Sahel are still recovering from the 2009/2010 food and nutrition crisis. Prices are 50% above the 5-year average in the surplus producing area of Bol, and 28% above average in the capital Ndjaména. The net production deficit is placed at 455,000 mt, which is likely to pose a serious food availability issue in Chad. 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).

- The national food security assessment has been finalised, and preliminary results were presented; more than 3.5 million people (severe and moderate) are food insecure in rural Chad in the Sahelian belt, and 1.2 million people will require emergency food assistance over the coming months.

- Currently, WFP’s protracted relief and recovery operation is targeting a total of 1.6 million beneficiaries. Since January, 500,000 people have been supported. WFP is now scaling up the operation. Plans include provision for blanket feeding, general food distributions, food-for-work activities and targeted supplementary feeding for children. The current needs stand thus at 90,400 mt, of which 49,000 mt require prepositioning before the rainy season. Long procurement/transport lead times (four to six months) and the inaccessibility of most of bases during the rainy season (from June to October) are the main operational constraints. In order to overcome and tackle these issues, WFP Chad focuses its efforts on pre-positioning of food commodities between February and June.

- In order to complement the protracted relief and recovery operation, school feeding activities are implemented in the areas most at risk of food insecurity and with a gross enrolment rate lower than the national average, and weighted average in the Sahelian belt. The project targets 205,000 students in 2012. In addition, the families of 47,000 girls in upper grades will receive dry take-home rations to increase enrolment and attendance of girls.

- WFP and UNICEF have now finalized a joint response plan for the blanket feeding activities.

- WFP’s United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) provides a vital air-link to more than 100 humanitarian organizations in Chad, at a total requirement of USD 17.6 million in 2012.

### MAURITANIA

- Latest findings of the recent food security assessment have been released and indicate that in rural areas, 24.6% of households are food insecure (severe and moderate), or nearly 700,000 people. This figure is almost three times higher compared to the rates observed in December 2010. The east and south are the region’s most affected, namely Hodh Echargui, Guidmaga, Gorgol and Assaba. The rain-fed and agro-pastoral livelihood zones are the most food insecure areas.

- In November 2011, the Government of Mauritania already 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 making final preparations for the implementation of an emergency operation in support of the Government Plan, aiming to assist over 380,000 people. Targeting for the planned activities under the emergency operation has started, and purchase has begun. Nutrition and school feeding activities under the country programme are ongoing.

- WFP is currently evaluating measures to improve the port capacity in Mauritania. Logistical constraints (e.g. regarding transport, storage) could hinder WFP distributions if the national capacity is overrun. The vast distances between villages throughout the country will constraint operations as it will increase transport costs, but also increase the time and resources necessary to reach the necessary villages.

- WFP’s present pipeline is worrisome. The ongoing country programme is currently financed at only 10%, which means that the school meals programme, which serves as an important safety net for school children, has only minimal stocks. WFP has therefore opted for the local and regional purchase of rice and wheat.
• 545,000 beneficiaries are planned to be reached through the CP school meals, the drought emergency operation, and the refugee emergency operation.

**MALI**

• Coarse grain prices have increased dramatically between October and December 2011, and stabilised by end of the December 2011 at high levels. Millet and sorghum remain scarce in the markets of Bamako and Kayes. The CILSS mission conducted in December indicated that prices should stabilize following the unusual post harvest increase, but will be high going into the lean season.

• Last week, the Commission on Food Security released findings of the Early Warning Report review. Additional 36 new communes have been added to the previous list of 159 communes. The total number of food insecure communes facing economic hardship is now 195.

• In line with the Government national action plan launched in November in response to the drought, WFP is about to start the implementation of an emergency operation to support approximately 770,000 beneficiaries until December 2012. Five sub-offices in drought affected areas have developed action plans for the implementation of the emergency operation, which have been finalized last week.

• Activities to be implemented in a phased approach will include unconditional cash distribution, nutrition activities (blanket supplementary feeding and targeted supplementary feeding, food/cash for asset creation and unconditional cash transfers. A feasibility study on the targeted cash distributions has been finalised regarding targeting and partnership arrangements. Other ongoing activities in the drought and conflict-affected areas include school feeding interventions under the country programme that are expected to commence in April 2012.

• WFP and UNICEF have now finalized a joint response plan for the blanket feeding activities.

**BURKINA FASO**

• On 2 March 2012, the Government of Burkina has officially declared that the country was facing a critical food and nutrition crisis, and called on the national and international solidarity to support Burkina Faso in coping with the crisis. 170 communes are currently at risk of food insecurity.

• Food prices remain higher compared to seasonal averages and are a serious concern. According to preliminary results of February assessments, there is a significant increase of cereal prices (+ 32% maize, + 34% millet, + 39% sorghum) as compared to the same period last year, posing food access difficulties to poor and vulnerable households.

• WFP has extended its current protracted relief and recovery operation until May 2012, to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable women and children. Currently, over 75,000 children under 5, and over 18,000 pregnant and lactating women in the Northern, the Eastern and the Sahel (the most vulnerable regions) are benefiting from the nutrition operation.

• In addition, WFP has scaled up the ongoing protracted relief and recovery operation. Nutritional assistance will prevent acute malnutrition through blanket supplementary feeding for children of 6-23 months, treatment of moderate acutely malnourished in children under 5, and malnourished pregnant and lactating women from March to December 2012. Additional activities, such as cash and food for work, as well as blanket feeding are also envisaged. Furthermore, assistance to the refugees arriving in Burkina Faso from Mali is also included.

**CAMEROON**

• A joint crop-assessment mission undertaken in November 2011 estimated that the 2011 cereal harvest in the Extreme-North region and Logone and Chari districts was below the previous year’s production. This region is repeatedly exposed to climatic shocks, and already high malnutrition rates usually increase during the lean season. Access to food may be problematic for already vulnerable households due to the high food prices noted over the past weeks. Chronic malnutrition rates remain above the
40% critical threshold in the North and Extreme-North reaching 40.2 and 44.9%, compared with 35.7% and 43.3% in recent years.

- Following a Government request, WFP has finalized an emergency operation to support more than 350,000 people which will start in April 2012. Activities include targeted food assistance coupled with targeted supplementary feeding activities for moderate acutely malnourished children under 5, and malnourished pregnant and lactating women, as well as supplementary blanket feeding activities for children under 2, and pregnant and lactating women. Targeted food assistance, including through food and cash and voucher distributions, will target the 200,000 mostly affected people. The food rations will include cereals, pulses, fortified vegetable oil and salt, designed to meet the recommended daily caloric intake of about 2,100 kcal. Family rations will be distributed on a monthly basis.

- The main logistical constraint for the implementation of the drought response is the poor state of secondary roads during the rainy season from June to September. Additional storage capacity will be sought in Kousséri, where the current warehouse used by WFP will not suffice. The rent of two private warehouses of 1,800 mt capacity is planned in order to avert storage congestion. Extended delivery points will be established in Garoua, Maroua, and Kousséri.

**SENEGAL**

- The latest needs assessment conducted by WFP, the Government and partners in February 2012 confirmed that household food stocks are close to depleted in most affected communities. During this assessment it was found that in six regions food insecurity was already above 50%, namely in Ziguinchor, Kolda, Sedhiou, Kédougou, Fatick and Kaolack. The prevalence is expected to increase further considering a longer than usual lean season, starting as early as March, as opposed to July 2012.

- In addition, the February assessment revealed that households have already started adopting negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing the number of meals per day, skipping days without food, switching to less favourable, but cheaper food, selling cattle, and buying food on credit. Some households had already passed several days without food.

- Food insecurity is further compounded by an increase in food prices on local markets. In January, the prices for local millet, maize and sorghum were between 26 and 31% higher compared to last year. As for imported rice, an increase of 12% was noted. As a result, food accessibility is severely constrained.

- Overall 850,000 people are estimated to live in food insecurity. Among these, WFP plans to support 806,000 most vulnerable people located in Ziguinchor, Kolda, Sédiou, Kédougou, Kaolack, Kaffrine, Matam and Tambacounda. Another 134,000 children and women will be provided with nutrition support in Matam, Thiès, Diourbel, Kolda, Louga, Saint-Louis, Sédiou, Kaffrine, Kédougou, Tambacounda and Ziguinchor.

- Currently, the distribution of school meals is on-going throughout Senegal. 4,700 mt are currently delivered to over 2,900 elementary and primary schools. In addition to WFP’s current activities for 335,000 beneficiaries, a scale-up to support up to 660,000 insecure people is estimated to be required over the coming months through the drought specific scale-up.

- Communities in the Casamance region have been suffering from the impact of a protracted conflict, which has progressively eroded coping mechanisms and led to the displacement of the populations due to the latest outbreak of violence two weeks ago.

**The Gambia**

- On 6 March 2012, the Minister of Agriculture, on behalf of the Government of The Gambia declared a national emergency and called for international assistance to address the consequences of the crop failure, which also affected The Gambia.

- Late, erratic and unevenly distributed rainfall during the 2011/2012 cropping season led to a significant decline and low quality of agricultural production in The Gambia. Overall crop production is estimated to drop by 62% compared to 2010 and by 50% compared to the 5-year average. Compared to last year, particularly affected is the production of key food and cash crops such as rice (-74%), millet (-54%) and
groundnut (-64%). The period that subsistence farmers will be able to source food from own production is expected to drop from usual 6-7 months, down to average 3-4 months after the harvest - in some of the most affected areas even below 2 months. As a result, farmers throughout the country are experiencing an early and protracted lean season, on average commencing in March 2012.

- Farmer households in the most and borderline affected districts already began to resort to food related coping strategies, by reducing daily food intake in terms of frequency of meals, overall quantity and diversity of ingredients while employing other negative coping strategies to provide for daily income, such as intensified collection of forest wood, sale of livestock or borrowing. Due to the difficulty of paying school fees, children are reportedly withdrawn from schools. Crop failure has also resulted in low seed quality and general seed scarcity, while putting at risk the upcoming planting season and the 2012/2013 harvest.

- The Government of The Gambia, together with humanitarian partners, is finalizing a multi-sector needs assessment with the objective of completing pending data needs in preparation of a joint emergency response. Preliminary estimates suggest that the total vulnerable population amounts to about 605,000 people, of which more than 100,000 are children under the age of 5. Of the 39 rural districts in The Gambia, 19 districts are considered most affected by the crop failure, with a total population of 428,000, including 73,800 children under the age of 5.

### Resourcing Update

Donor contributions continue to be sought in order to prepare for a rapid response to complement Government plans. Landlocked countries in the region face long lead times, hence there is an urgent need for immediate availability of funds and commodities. WFP is adopting measures including advance financing, the use of the forward purchase facility, and regional procurement to reduce lead times.

**Contributions to the Sahel response currently amount to USD 205.6 million.** WFP is grateful for the recent contributions from multilateral donors, as well as directed contributions from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the United States. **Further contributions are needed immediately** in order to allow WFP to carry out large scale procurement and shipping of commodities.

- The **immediate response activities in support of the displaced population in Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as the response to the newly declared emergency in The Gambia** require additional funding from donors.

- For the drought response operations in Niger, Senegal, Cameroon, Mali, and Mauritania, contributions are urgently required to speed up procurement and deliveries.

- In light of critical funding shortfalls, **WFP Logistics is urgently seeking financial support of USD 15 million in order to sustain the UNHAS operations in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania**, as well as the new regional operation, augmenting the regional logistics capacities.

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