

Emergency response in northeast Nigeria critical to preventing a deterioration in food security

Conflict continues to severely disrupt livelihoods and cause high levels of displacement in northeast Nigeria. Humanitarian agencies have greatly expanded response to the ongoing food security emergency, but households remain highly dependent on this assistance to meet their essential needs. An Elevated Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) continues for inaccessible areas, although there is insufficient evidence to make a formal determination, and remote internally displaced person (IDP) settlement areas could, in a worst-case scenario, become cut off by violence and experience extreme food insecurity, similar to what occurred in Bama LGA in 2016. A resolution to the conflict, and a further increase in humanitarian access and assistance are necessary to improve food security outcomes for millions across northeast Nigeria.

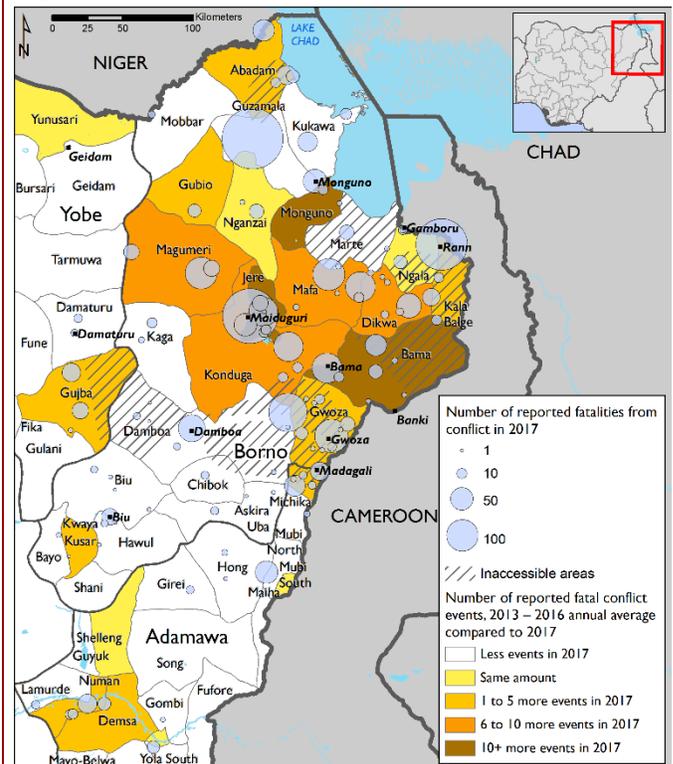
Violence in northeast Nigeria remains very concerning. Although conflict led to fewer fatalities across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States last year, fatal conflict events were more frequent in 2017 than in previous years according to data from ACLED. In 2017 there were 25 percent more fatal conflict events than the 2013-2016 average (Figure 1). Outside of major town and roadways, attacks and the threat of attack continue to limit important livelihoods activities and drive further population displacement.

Most IDPs and poor households in Borno State and parts of Adamawa and Yobe States remain heavily dependent on assistance, as well as some petty trading and limited casual labor opportunities. Staple food prices remain well-above average, making food access even more difficult for households with little income-earning opportunity. IDPs in camps or camp-like settings, including approximately 650,000 people in Borno State, have particularly limited access to land and agricultural labor opportunities. The February 2018 International Organization for Migration assessment of displaced people indicates that lack of food remains the primary concern for most IDPs. Similarly, the September/October 2017 Emergency Food Security Assessment organized by the World Food Programme indicated widespread acute food insecurity based on multiple indicators.

Further, it is likely that significant populations remain in areas of the northeast that are currently inaccessible to humanitarian actors. Reports indicate that people fleeing from conflict-affected, inaccessible areas are often severely food insecure and exhibit signs of malnutrition. Although available evidence is insufficient to make a formal determination, given the severity of outcomes observed in adjacent, accessible areas and considering inaccessible areas most likely face similar or worse conditions, there is a continuing Elevated Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) in inaccessible areas of the northeast. In a worst-case scenario, Famine is also possible were remote, semi-urban IDP settlement areas to become cutoff due to a shift in conflict and emergency assistance provision is halted.

Assuming conflict continues at similar levels, food security will continue to deteriorate through the summer lean season, which is when income and food stocks are most stretched and food prices peak before the harvest. Humanitarian agencies have greatly expanded response since 2016. However, large populations in the northeast will remain heavily dependent on this assistance to meet minimum food needs, including places like Rann in Kala Balge that become largely cut-off during the rainy season. Efforts to build resilience and support alternative livelihood activities remain important, but are unlikely to address acute food security outcomes in the short-term for populations of greatest concern. A resolution to the conflict, and a further increase in access and assistance provision, are necessary to sustainably end extreme levels of hunger in northeast Nigeria.

Figure 1. Comparison of conflict events and fatalities



Source: ACLED data for fatalities and conflict events