Frequent climatic shocks and vulnerability in Mauritania mean hundreds of thousands of people face the painful consequences of food insecurity and malnutrition every year. 57,000 refugees from Mali face a protracted struggle to thrive without hope of returning home soon. Actors implementing humanitarian and development activities are working together to build resilience through innovation and long-term solutions. Now is the time to break the cycle and help people reshape their future.
A HISTORY OF CHRONIC VULNERABILITIES AND RECURRENT SHOCKS

The people of Mauritania are striving to withstand the consequences of prolonged vulnerabilities each year, punctured with crippling peak years that trigger critical humanitarian needs. Fueled by a challenging natural environment, drought is a recurrent threat that drives chronic food insecurity, malnutrition and livelihood fragility. Rainfall has steadily declined since the 1950s, and water is retreating deeper underground. As the 23rd most vulnerable country in the world to climate change, natural hazards in Mauritania are long-term challenges that generate long-term needs.

Mauritania still struggles to recover from one of the world’s biggest food crises that wreaked havoc on the Sahel in 2011 and 2012. In 2017 the country was hit by a severe drought and confronted by an unusually long lean season, exhausting vulnerable communities’ coping mechanisms. Over 550,000 people were driven into food crisis and 124,000 affected by malnutrition in 2018.

IN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Mauritania is affected by challenges stirring in the Sahel, particularly the persisting conflict in neighboring Mali. The 57,000 Malians who fled to Mauritania require humanitarian assistance to survive. From January to July 2018 alone almost 7,000 migrants arrived in Nouadhibou, as per governmental sources. In recognition of these and other complicating factors, Mauritania is included in the UN Support Plan for the Sahel as part of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) framework.

Compounding these issues, the population is expected to double by 2039, and there is a growing youth demographic bulge with limited livelihood options. With thousands of children outside the formal education system, young people searching for opportunity are at risk of radicalization.

A DIFFICULT YEAR AHEAD

Further pressure on food security and nutrition is expected in 2019. Successive years of biomass deficits, low and poorly distributed rainfall, have strained resources and resilience and depleted assets, and the alert has been raised that Mauritania may face an early pastoral lean season for the second year in a row. Although some regions have received average rainfall with better distribution in comparison with last year, the situation remains difficult for certain areas in the southwest that experience extended periods without rain.

Significant biomass deficits are observed in the northern areas of Trarza, Brakna, Assaba, Tagant and the northeast of Gorgol.

1 World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal
2 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
3 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2015)
4 Biomass is the total production of above-ground dry matter. See ACF definition
5 ACF: 2018 Biomass analysis of the production and 2019 perspectives
FOOD INSECURITY PROJECTION JUNE-AUGUST 2019

Cadre Harmonisé November 2018 projections for the 2019 lean season (IPC Phases 3 & 4)

CHRONIC VULNERABILITIES HAVE MADE SUFFERING IN MAURITANIA ALARMINGLY PREDICTABLE.

Severe Acute Malnutrition & Refugee Presence

August 2018 SMART survey (UNICEF), UNHCR

Actors implementing humanitarian and development activities stand ready now to scale-up resilience efforts while still catering for urgent humanitarian needs.
PEOPLE IN NEED

160,000
MALNURISHED

575,600
FOOD INSECURE

57,000
REFUGEES

Photo: UNICEF/Alvarez
FOOD INSECURITY

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

1996 World Food Summit Plan of Action

Mauritania’s deep-rooted vulnerability to drought drives high levels of chronic food insecurity. As a central challenge in the country, major deficits force the country to import 70% of its food. While historical data shows that high levels of food insecurity occurs each year, there are exceptional years where humanitarian needs peak, such as in 2017-2018.

With severe biomass anomalies already identified in October 2018, there is a risk of a pasture deficit and of a decline in agricultural production exacerbating farmers’ and pastoralists’ vulnerability following last year’s drought and consequent shock. Despite some improvements in agricultural production compared to last year (+18%) and the average of the last 5 years (+9%), it is clear that the gains are minor when faced with the needs, which are largely covered by the food imports. In general, it is expected that these modest improvements may be insufficient for households that are dependent on agriculture and livestock to recover from the 2017-2018 drought, particularly given the persisting structural obstacles for food security and nutrition. A significant part of the population has in fact been affected and forced to use exceedingly negative coping strategies.

This presents a major threat to livelihoods, as 75.9 per cent of total employment in Mauritania relies on agriculture. It is estimated that 575,600 people will be facing food crisis during the 2019 lean season.

“A HISTORY OF HIGH RATES OF FOOD INSECURITY

“The situation was difficult for many families for the last two years. No rains meant a very bad harvest for many of my neighbors and unhealthy livestock for others. There were very little stocks of food, market prices of food and animals went up. We’re worried that next year will be the same because the rains didn’t arrive on time this year either. Our seeds, and our animals are all we have, but if they don’t grow or stay healthy we will be left with nothing again.”

Khadietou

6 Famine Early Warning System Network, Mauritania Price Bulletin (January 2018)
7 UNDP Human Development Report
MALNUTRITION

For the past two years, Mauritania has surpassed the emergency threshold for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) set by the World Health Organization. Acute malnutrition is a persistent cycle in the country with peaks in the lean season. Increased pressure on scarce resources has deteriorated the nutritional situation of children. The prevalence of chronic malnutrition, which manifests itself in stunted growth and lowered IQ scores, is 23.3% at the national level, and 23 of 56 Moughataas are in a critical nutrition situation (GAM >15% and/or SAM > 2%).

The current SAM rate is 2.3%, corresponding to the same figure from the 2017 SMART survey (completed in the lean season.) Stunting continues to display the long-term physical costs of malnutrition in the country. Malnutrition also touches refugees; in the Mbera refugee camp, delayed growth development is estimated at 24.2%, of which 4.7% are severe cases.

Access to water and sanitation services in Mauritania is low and remains an aggravating factor in malnutrition. Only 47% of malnutrition centers in rural and semi-urban areas have access to drinking water and sanitation services, reducing the quality of care and increasing the admission time of children in treatment.

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8 Districts
9 Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions
10 Stratégie National pour un Accès Durable à l’Eau et l’Assainissement 2016-2030 (SNADEA), August 2016 report
The continued violence in neighboring Mali has forced over 140,000 people to leave their homes. 57,000 have found safety in and around the Mbera refugee camp in south-eastern Mauritania, and numbers are growing, with over 5,700 new registrations since the start of 2018 (a growth rate of over 10% in less than one year). Seven years on, the situation has slipped into a protracted refugee crisis with no sign of ending soon. Despite a peace agreement in 2015, the ongoing instability in Mali prevents safe returns. The refugees face food insecurity and malnutrition, and the majority rely on food assistance. That assistance is at risk as gaps in funding throughout 2018 have led to serious cuts to rations.

"Since the problems started in Mali the situation has only got worse. Several attacks took place at the market in our village and we had to leave. We were always afraid for ourselves and our children. We could not take it anymore."

Ataua
Peule refugee fled the village of Diora, in the region of Mopti – May 2018

The district hosting refugees had pre-existing struggles with drought impact and scarce resources that have been further exacerbated. Even prior to the arrival of the refugees access to safe drinking water was only 36%. Many refugees fled with their livestock, intensifying the strain on the limited water supply and pasture. With heightened risk of tension host communities cannot be left behind as their perception of inequality in access to resources and basic services grows. This frustration increases susceptibility to the influence of nearby extremist groups and radicalization.

Despite the efforts of all involved actors under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) education, water and sanitation and health services continue to be frequently limited. Due to a lack of funds the camp is without preschool programs and younger children face growing stress, weak possibility for relief, and high chances of permanent health and development issues.

Mauritania also has more than 2,400 urban refugees and asylum seekers.
CHALLENGES

Humanitarian appeals for Mauritania were funded at less than 40% in 2016 and 2017, severely limiting operational capacity. 2018 was an exceptional year due to the mobilization of the humanitarian community following the declaration of the Sahel regional crisis.

**UNTIMELY FUNDING**

Early response is critical for the mitigation of the lean season impact. In the best-case scenario, food assistance operations require a minimum lead-up time of 2-3 months to procure and deliver food to people, yet funding is often received during the peak of the lean season, which means that aid is delivered after the population has already been hit by the most severe impact. Food security actors typically need funding in January to prepare timely response (such as targeting of beneficiaries and procurement of food and transport) but in 2018 initial funds were not received until March, and the bulk of funding received between May and July, which was too late to cater for the most severe needs at the peak of the lean season. This was partially offset using internal advance mechanisms by some Agencies, but these remain limited compared to the overall needs.

Despite low and untimely funding in 2018, actors pulled together to provide lifesaving support to vulnerable communities. In synergy and coordination with Government response budgeted at 123M USD, UN Agencies and NGOs formulated a response plan budgeted at 116M USD and achieved significant results:

- **37,500** children treated for malnutrition
- **55,800** children and pregnant and lactating women received blanket feeding
- **382,100** people assisted with food distributions, cash transfers and animal health products

Critical shared services such as the UN Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) were also affected due to lack of funding in the last several years, which impacted the activities of humanitarian and development organizations. UNHAS is the safest, most efficient and cost effective means of transport for operations in Mauritania and is also essential for evacuation of staff in remote and hard to reach areas.

12 Financial Tracking System (FTS)
CHAMPIONING THE NEW WAY OF WORKING

Taking into account the recommendations of the World Humanitarian Summit, its Grand Bargain and the New Way of Working, Mauritania initiated an integrated planning process in 2017 involving the United Nations system, Government institutions and NGOs resulting in the adoption of the Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (CPDD) 2018-2022. The CPDD (replacing the UNDAF), is cosigned by Government and the UN, and it integrates humanitarian and development planning of UN agencies and six international NGOs¹³ to provide a comprehensive response to chronic humanitarian needs and reduce the needs of vulnerable populations, with the flexibility to develop event-specific emergency response plans. Further, the CPDD embeds a specific element of flexibility to allow for progressive alignment and stronger linkage to the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and its Support Plan.

3 Common Outcomes sit at the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

- Access to livelihood, to decent jobs and to economic opportunities is strengthened, and food security is improved.
- Institutions and communities contribute to sustainable management of natural resources, and to anticipate/respond to crises and to the effects of climate change.
- Vulnerable populations have access to adequate/durable services for health, nutrition, WASH.

FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION: 3 EXAMPLES OF JOINT PLANNING AND JOINED-UP PROGRAMMING

Humanitarian and development actors in Mauritania have advanced the concept of the NWOW and Nexus into action through implementation of joint planning and joined-up programming to increase efficiency, avoid duplication and reduce costs.

- Zones of convergence: To sharpen integration at the delivery end, closer to beneficiaries on the ground, three zones of convergence have been identified: these are areas of collective and highly coordinated joint action (Hodh Ech Chargui, Guidimakha and peri-urban Nouakchott). In the Wilaya de Hodh Ech Chargui humanitarian and development actors, led by UNHCR and WFP, have launched the 2018-2022 Integrated Strategy for Strengthening Livelihoods of Refugees and Host Communities to implement sustainable solutions for refugees, strengthen resilience of host populations and foster peaceful coexistence. Using multipurpose cash assistance, financial inclusion, social safety nets, medical insurance, and other interventions, the strategy focuses on sustainable access to basic services, effective management of natural resources, protection, disaster and conflict risk reduction and governance.

- Peacebuilding Fund project: Building local capacity for conflict prevention: In recognition of high-risk inter-communal tension in Bassikounou, UN Agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, FAO and OHCHR) in collaboration with the Government, are leveraging the Nexus to reinforce local capacity to prevent conflict. Actors jointly implement activities towards peace dividends for host communities and refugees through peaceful natural resources management, income generating activities and sensitization of children and youth as positive actors for local peace. It also builds on the successful experience of developing and facilitating mixed local committees devoted to resource management and social and peaceful cohesion, which are interventions led by IOM and OHCHR since 2013.

- Adaptive Social Protection System (ASP): As a key investment in the Nexus, the Government of Mauritania is establishing a national Adaptive Social Protection mechanism, aiming to equip the country with the tools, processes and institutional framework to address both the underlying causes of structural poverty and transient food insecurity. This includes the design of a shock-responsive safety-net founded on a single Social Registry, handled by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and to be used by all actors (including humanitarian) to enhance the efficiency and consistency of targeted interventions for vulnerable households, and potentially compensate for untimely funding.

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¹³ Action Contre la Faim, Croix rouge française, Oxfam, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes-Lausanne, World Vision International
The CPDD is operationalized through annual work plans in complementarity and synergy with the actions carried out by the Government. The 2019 Plan de travail annuel (PTA) works towards the long-term solutions envisioned in the CPDD while adapting to year-to-year needs.

The 2019 PTA activities are organized around the three strategic priorities of the CPDD. Key areas of intervention include:

**INCLUSIVE GROWTH**

- Access to livelihoods and food security through targeted distribution of unconditional food or cash transfers combined with nutritional supplementation and decent employment through capacity strengthening and monitoring of labor markets will be improved.

- Institutional and communal capacity to anticipate and respond to crises and the effects of climate change will be advanced by strengthening the early warning system and supporting the development of the national platform for risk and disaster reduction. National institutions will be supported to develop comprehensive policies which contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth at central, decentralized and community level.

**HUMAN CAPITAL AND BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES**

- Access to quality education for children and young people (both formal and non-formal) will be improved by supporting preschool classes, promoting girls’ education, reintegrating out-of-school children, providing teacher trainings and implementing an education quality package.

- Vulnerable populations will have greater access to sustainable health and nutrition, safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation services through providing medical care for refugees and asylum seekers (including prevention and treatment of malnutrition), building the health system’s capacity to manage SAM, improving WASH services and access to safe drinking water in refugee host communities, and updating the contingency plan and pre-positioning of stocks in flood risk areas.

- Protection against various forms of discrimination, including exploitation and physical, psychological and sexual violence will be strengthened through implementation of child protection mechanisms in the refugee camp and host communities and prevention and response to gender-based violence and sexual violence.

**GOUVERNANCE**

- Peaceful coexistence between refugees and the host community will be supported through capacity building of border management actors while involving border communities, advocating with authorities for the asylum system implementation and assisting refugees with special needs.

- Access to civil status will be improved through advocacy and capacity building efforts to ensure the issuance of civil status documents for refugees.
**RISK OF INACTION**

- Without an urgent and sustained response Mauritania risks the increase of severe malnutrition, child mortality and stunting to emergency levels.
- Without an investment to strengthen coping mechanisms to respond and recover from drought, pressure on natural resources will create further food insecurity, escalate displacement and urbanization and open the door to radicalization.
- Without efforts to build resilience, chronic vulnerabilities and recurrent humanitarian needs will continue to handicap the country, including that of refugees.
- Without sustained support for UNHAS humanitarian and development activities are in danger, including the safety of staff working in remote and hard to reach areas.

**BUDGET**

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<th>PTA Total</th>
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| Développement    |           | **US$ 157.6 M**
|                  |           | ($US 3.8 M for refugees) |
| Humanitarian     |           | **US$ 74.4 M**
|                  |           | ($US 33.8 M for refugees) |
| Refugees total   |           | **US$ 37.6 M** |

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PLAN, PLEASE GO TO HTTPS://RELIEFWEB.INT/COUNTRY/MRT**
Mauritania: Fighting chronic vulnerabilities
May 2019