

Damasak /Mobbar LGA – Rapid Assessment

Key Messages for Decision Makers

- Before the crisis, the main source of livelihood for the men was farming, fishing and livestock rearing. Almost 70% of the population were involved in farming, 30 percent in fishing, with majority involved in petty trading activity at off seasons. Women were selling food (street food and local pasta) and involved in cap making.
- At the moment, source of livelihood for men includes farming for a small fraction and petty trading. Some women selling street food have lost their capital, while few of them are involved in cap making.
- Farm lands within a perimeter of 2-3 km outside of Damasak town were deemed not safe. Although residents are allowed by the military to farm within a radius of 10 km, farmers are not willing to go beyond 3 km because of security threat.
- According to the key informants, almost 65% of Damasak population have returned back. The remaining people are reported to be in Niger or Maiduguri. The Nigerian Immigration Service has registered 90,000 people, while a recent head count carried out by INTERSOS provides an estimate of 63,500 people.
- According to the key informants, almost 90% of the traders have not returned to Damasak. Most of them are reported to be in Maiduguri and Niger where they are running commercial activities.
- There is no security restriction on commercial activities, and the main roads axis (Damasak – Maiduguri; Damasak – Niger) are open to commercial trucks. Cash based transfer is gradually feasible, and traders could get additional food supplies from Kano and Kaduna, in order to respond to an increased demand.
- Overall, the prevalence of global food insecurity (severe and moderate) is 51%, of which 5% are severely food insecure. The prevalence of global food insecurity is higher amongst returnees (61%) and IDPs (51%) in comparison to host populations (34%).
- According to the October 2017 Cadre Harmonise (CH), from October to December 2017, Mobbar LGA will be in CH phase 3 (crisis), with 57,000 people in phase CH 3 and 4 (crisis and emergency). During the 2018 lean season, the LGA will remain in CH phase 3, but the number of people in crisis and emergency situation will reach 60,000.
- By comparison, during the 2017 lean season, 98,000 people were in the three combined critical food insecurity situations, including 1,700 people in famine-like conditions.
- Overall, the food security situation is not so alarming, therefore there is no need to provide blanket food assistance. Food assistance should instead target the most vulnerable: those who missed the planting season; those who have no access to irrigation farming; those without abled body people; street food vendors who have lost their capital; fishermen who have lost their productive assets, etc.
- There is a need to organize a joint response analysis with relevant humanitarian actors in order to reach a broader consensus around the following issues: (1) number of people in need of food assistance, (2) most appropriate transfer modality, (3) duration of assistance, (3) transition to a more targeted assistance tailored to the needs of affected people.

1. Background

As part of humanitarian responses to the protracted conflict which caused mass displacement and loss of livelihood, several humanitarian actors are currently providing lifesaving assistance in the North East to millions of people. In view of the transitioning from lifesaving to livelihood interventions by some actors, such as ICRC, it has been agreed to conduct a joint rapid food security and market assessment in Mobbar and Kukawa LGA.

Information about the current overall population is Damasak according to the Nigerian Immigration Service and the military is around 90,000 individuals, but according to the monthly update by INTERSOS the population stands at 63,500 individuals. This variance may be attributed to the movement of households across the Niger-Nigeria border depending on food distribution days within Nigeria and Niger. Returnees were population that were earlier displaced to Niger and Maiduguri.

There has been presence of some actors in Damasak providing livelihood and protection related programmes. Amongst the humanitarian agencies on ground identified by the respondents include: ICRC, NRC, ACF, UNHCR and INTERSOS.

This assessment sought to gather data on the food security situation, market situation, humanitarian needs and population movements in communities in Damasak.

2. Methodology

The assessment was conducted on the 5th of December, 2017. The focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with various actors including community leaders, women groups, market leaders and some traders. A group of IDPs, host communities and returnees were amongst those interviewed. Discussions centered around access to food, livelihood activities, access to markets, livelihood coping strategies, daily wages and access to humanitarian assistance.

3. Key findings

- 1. Food security situation:** households reported that the food security situation has improved compared to 5 months ago. This is mainly attributed to humanitarian assistance from ICRC and support from other organizations like NRC and ACF. Agricultural production was hampered by late planting and a deficit in rainfall which affected crop yield, resulting in little or no harvest by a sizeable number of the households. On the other hand, some households complained of lack of inputs and access to agricultural inputs and tools.
- 2. Agricultural Production:** access to land is a challenge, as farming activities can only be done within a safe distance of 2-3 km from Damasak town. Although the military allow residents to move as far as 10 km, the threat of possible attacks on farm lands cannot be ruled out. Before the conflict, the millet consumed by households were locally produced within Damasak and surrounding villages in Mobbar LGA. Due to the insurgency, only 10-15 percent of millet consumed is produced locally. A larger quantity of millet is sourced from Maiduguri and Gubio markets. Maize was another commodity produced in large quantities from Baga. However due to the inaccessibility of LGAs like Guzamala, a connecting route to Baga, the quantity of maize previously available has significantly dropped. Wheat and vegetables such as (onions, okra, water melon, tomatoes, cabbage and lettuce) were produced in large quantities under irrigation farming before the onset of the conflict. Harvest of dry season farming in Damasak starts from late January to May, contributing to food availability in the first half of the year and also serving as an important source of revenue. At the moment, dry season farming reaches barely 20 percent of the erstwhile production capacity.

3. **Infrastructures:** Damasak was characterized by abandoned houses, public buildings and hospitals about 4-5 months ago. At present, most houses and public buildings have been rebuilt or under reconstruction. For instance, during conflict the central market was destroyed by the non-state armed groups, but now it has been rebuilt and currently in use.
4. **Financial services:** no bank is functional in Damasak at the moment.
5. **Telephone network:** the existing phone telecommunication network provider with active call, SMS and data services is Orange network telecommunication service provider.
6. **Security:** the security situation remains fragile and unpredictable, as Damasak had experienced attacks by non-state armed groups in the past. Although residents are allowed to freely move within the town and markets, security forces man major entry points into the town.
7. **Markets:** Damasak central market operates daily, although the market is yet to return to pre-crisis level. Pre-crisis number of traders was around 2,000 actors (wholesalers, retailers and collectors). But at the moment the number of wholesalers, traders and collectors are around 300-350. Also to note, before the conflict, residents accessed other secondary markets, such as Doji, Gari, Gashakar and Digiltara markets surrounding Damasak. At the moment these markets are not operating, as the communities/villages where they were located have been deserted. Considering that business activities are picking up gradually, from when the market was re-opened early this year. In comparing the volume of sales in the past 3 months, traders observed that sales have improved over these past 3-4 months.
8. **Main trade routes:** at the moment the only market accessible in Damasak, is the Central markets. Main staples that are sold by traders and consumed by households are supplied from Maiduguri and Gubio markets. The preferred staple food are millet and maize; sweet pepper is also an important item in the food basket of the household. Traders from Damasak patronize neighboring market (Gagamari and Chetimari market) of Diffa region in Niger.
10. **Food storage:** previously groundnuts, maize, beans and sweet pepper were predominantly grown and produced for commercial purposes by farmers. Traders bought and stored large quantities of these commodities, with stocks that could last for as long as 9 months, way into the lean season when food prices are high.
11. **Prices of staple food:** the prices of food are observed to have decreased significantly over the 3 last months, except for groundnuts, red beans and salt.

Food commodity	Current price	Previous 3 months	% Change in current price	Degree of change
Maize Flour	100	250	-150%	↓
Local Rice	250	400	-60%	↓
Millet	150	300	-100%	↓
Peanuts	400	400	0%	→
Red Beans	300	250	17%	↑
Onion	100	200	-100%	↓
Palm oil	450	580	-29%	↓
Vegetable oil	400	460	-15%	↓
Salt	200	150	25%	↑

- 12. Traders' business and response capacity:** In the event of a 25 percent increase in demand, the traders in Damasak markets will be able to deliver adequate stocks within a week. On the same note, the traders will be able to meet a demand of 50 percent increase, with adequate supply of stocks in their shops.
- 13. Constraints increase sale:** lack of capital, insecurity and difficulty in transporting goods due to security risk. Closure/inaccessibility of the other trade routes and LGAs like Guzamala are also amongst the constraints that traders are facing.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

- Overall, the food security situation is not so alarming, therefore there is no need to provide blanket food assistance. Food assistance should target the most vulnerable: those who missed the planting season; those who have no access to irrigation farming; those without body abled people; street food vendors who have lost their capital, fishermen who have lost their productive assets, etc.).
- It is worth mentioning, that food production has been extremely limited due to some factors deficit rainfall and late planting of crops, during the last farming season, this is expected to disrupt food stock at household level. This indicative of a need of humanitarian actors to plan agricultural intervention's and livelihood programs to target farming populations affected by the low agricultural production.
- There is a need to organize a joint response analysis in order reach a broader consensus around the following issues: (1) number of people in need of food assistance, (2) most appropriate transfer modality, (3) duration of assistance, (3) transition to a more targeted assistance tailored to the needs of affected people.
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