

Food Security Overview and Impacts of Food Assistance Cuts on the Central African Refugee Population in Eastern Cameroon

Background:

- For the past couple of years, WFP food assistance has been vital in promoting and sustaining food and nutrition security of the Central African (CAR) refugee population, who arrived in Cameroon in early 2014 in extremely critical malnutrition and health conditions. To date there are some 260,000 CAR refugees in the East, Adamawa and North regions. Some 70% are settled amongst the communities whilst 30% have settled in one of the seven established refugee sites.
- WFP, in partnership with UNHCR, introduced cash in 2016 as a means to provide access to food for a selected group of refugees in the Gado refugee site. This month, WFP plans to expand cash assistance (replacing the in-kind ration) to three other refugee sites in the East region (Lolo, Timangolo and Ngarissingo). In addition to food assistance, WFP provides preventive nutrition support to children 6-23 months amongst the refugee and host population.
- Efforts to continue sustained food assistance have been jeopardized by severe lack of funding, which has forced WFP to drastically reduce food support to 156,000 CAR refugees by 50 percent since October 2016, which provides far below the minimum daily 2,100 kilocalories.
- Since July 2016, WFP and UNHCR have been regularly informing partners about the incoming shortfall and the need for urgent additional resources. A joint press conference was held by WFP and UNHCR in November 2016, appealing for 2.4 million dollars to respond to the food assistance needs of CAR refugees by end of December 2016.
- The cuts in assistance will continue until new contributions are received to enable WFP to replenish its stocks and restore the full rations." For food and cash-based assistance, WFP has a funding shortfall of US\$8 million to cover the upcoming six months of 2017.
- The humanitarian community and the Government of Cameroon remain deeply concerned about the negative impact of the food assistance cuts, which has put the affected population, especially women and children, in a highly vulnerable situation, increasing their exposure to food insecurity and malnutrition and resulting in immediate detrimental effects on school attendance and increasing the protection risks, especially of women and girls.

Overall food security situation:

- Over 1 million people in the East, Adamawa and North regions are estimated to be food insecure with an overall food insecurity increase from 19 percent in 2015 to 25 percent registered in 2016. Particularly in the Adamawa region, the food insecurity change over the last year portrays an alarming increase, from 19 percent in 2015 to 39 percent.

- In August 2016, prior to the food ration reductions, a WFP-UNHCR Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) indicated a trend of improved food security for the majority of CAR refugees, after two years of humanitarian response for those that had arrived in Eastern Cameroon at the height of the emergency. These results risk being compromised in the face of ration cuts, particularly for the segments of the refugee population which remain vulnerable and at-risk of food insecurity.
More than 70 percent of the recent waves of CAR refugees remain dependent on WFP to meet their food and nutrition needs with little or no means to cover their basic food needs. (IFORD / UNHCR; baseline assessment study on the livelihood of refugees using the Household Economic Approach (HEA)).
- It is important to note that not some refugees that arrived during the course of 2016, following recent spikes in violence in CAR, could not be supported due to the lack of resources.

Reasons for food assistance cuts:

- The funding environment is becoming more strained due to the protracted nature of the CAR refugee crisis and shifting priorities in donor funding, which has been reflected in the steady decline in the amount of resources WFP has received for its programmes: in 2016, WFP experienced a 25 percent drop in funding support compared to 2015. As food stocks started to run low in October 2016, reducing the size of the monthly ration was the only way to stretch limited supplies, ensuring that assistance continued without a complete disruption.
- WFP has a budget of US\$ 35 million required to meet the food and nutrition needs of the CAR refugees in 2017, of which only 55 percent has been resourced so far.

Consequences of underfunding and food ration cuts

- Reducing the monthly food ration by half means that the refugees only receive an intake of 1,048 kilocalories per person/day. In addition, fortified and blended foods, intended to boost the nutritional value of the food ration, have not been included in the monthly food basket as planned. Cash based assistance will continue up to June also with a 50 percent cut. The refugees in Gado who were initially receiving about \$15 (XAF 8,000) a month now survive on \$7.5 (XAF 4,000) and resources for the cash programmes are expected to run out completely in June.
- The reduced food assistance expose the affected populations to increased food insecurity and malnutrition, and risk compromising the gains already made in stabilizing their food consumption and nutrition status.
- Already in late November 2016, WFP preliminary monitoring results recorded an increase in the number of households with poor food consumption after two consecutive months of reduced assistance. Upcoming surveys are expected to further confirm this pattern.
- Cuts in assistance also put the affected population, especially women and children, in a highly vulnerable situation, increasing the likelihood of turning to harmful coping mechanisms and severe measures to adopt to the situation, which could have irreversible impacts on short-and longer-term health and well-being. According to the IFORD/UNHCR livelihood baseline study carried out in December 2016, more frequently used coping strategies include: begging and borrowing, leading to accumulation of debts; forced migration in search of jobs; sale of productive assets; and families withdrawing their children from school.
- Authorities in refugee hosting areas could lose confidence in UN agencies and they may take rigid decisions in other to restrict the mobility of the refugees in order to prevent security incidents involving host communities.
- In a context of limited access to land, basic social services, employment and other income generating activities, the lack of food in the refugee communities is likely to increase the strain

on host communities as they turn to their hosts for support. It is also likely to increase tensions between the refugee and host community, with risk of exacerbating conflict the already fragile localities in eastern Cameroon.

- Relations between refugee communities and local populations in the East and Adamaoua have been strained in the recent past due to acts of banditry attributed to the refugees. There is reason to fear that some refugees could resort to criminal activities to fend for their families in the absence of food rations or cash assistance. Additional efforts and resources need to be deployed to avoid this scenario.

Activities being undertaken:

- WFP and UNHCR are conducting a vulnerability-based targeting exercise to ensure that the limited resources are directed towards the most vulnerable refugees. The ongoing household's vulnerability study, using the Household Economic Approach, will provide the basis for the design of further programmes with targeting based on vulnerability as opposed to status and to better adapt assistance to socioeconomic status and the needs of the refugees.
- For more long term solutions, UNHCR is developing a multi-year self-reliance and livelihood strategy (2017 – 2020) that will provide a framework to transition dependency situation to durable solutions, with a view of strengthening the humanitarian- development nexus. The strategy will consist of four priority areas that include: to provide support to basic social services on the ground; to increase the self-reliance of refugees; to strengthen the role of authorities; to target humanitarian assistance to people with specific needs. The engagement of international and national development actors as well as line ministries at capital and local level will be required for its implementation.

Key messages going forward:

- With the successful elections held in CAR in 2015, it was expected that the situation in the country will begin to see a turnaround in 2016, paving the way for refugees to envisage returning home. However, the security situation in CAR still leaves much to be desired, not the least because of the quasi absence of law enforcement and administrative structures and institutions beyond the capital city of Bangui.
- It is important to take into account the second return intentions survey carried out in December 2016, which revealed that 73% of CAR refugees do not intend to go home, mainly due to security concerns. Among those refugees wishing to go home, 29% would like to exercise that right in 2017 but the majority of them would like to do that after 2017.
- WFP and UNHCR therefore appeal for urgent support from donors to restore food assistance to normal levels and ensure that previous investments in nutrition, food security and other vital sectors are maintained until more longer term solutions are identified and implemented.
- WFP needs an additional US\$ 16 million to cover assistance for the year, of which US\$8 is urgently needed to fill the most critical gaps up to July and avoid a complete break in assistance.

WFP Resourcing Needs

2017 Requirements	Total Resourced	Total shortfall	%	Six months shortfalls
\$35 million	\$19 million	\$16 million	45	\$8 million