



# SAHEL FOOD CRISIS

## CARE's Resilience Response

### Overview

**T**he Sahel region in West Africa is among the poorest and least developed in the world. It is characterized by low-level seasonal rainfall and chronic food insecurity. In recent years, rainfall has decreased and became more erratic, resulting in poor agricultural productivity and high livestock mortality rates. Rates of global acute malnutrition amongst children are estimated at 14 percent. This chronic vulnerability, combined with the lasting impact of the recurrent droughts in recent years, has left the region prone to external shocks. **The most vulnerable households in the Sahel region, approximately one fifth of the population, live permanently on the edge of crisis survival.**

The year 2012 was not only defined by late and irregular rainfall. Birds, locusts and pests attacked the already sparse crops of farmers. This has resulted in a **serious deficit of crop production**, a lack of pasture and low water levels - all in a context of high and rising food prices. In addition, affected areas are also suffering from the loss of incomes from remittances previously sent by migrants, particularly those working in Libya and Ivory Coast who have fled those conflicts or lost their jobs.<sup>1</sup>

While the regional agricultural production for 2012 is slightly higher than the five-year average, localized shortfalls continue to impact food availability, with harvest deficits in Chad, Niger and Mauritania. Simultaneously, in comparison to the five-year average, **food prices are rising steeply**, leaving families even more vulnerable. While in some countries such as Niger and Chad food prices increased about 30 - 40 per cent, in some areas of



northern Mali prices skyrocketed by 90 per cent or more. More than half of the population of the Sahel buys their food at local markets - and often the expenditure for groceries accounts for 80 per cent of their household budget. The rising cost of food therefore has a serious impact on those most affected by the food crisis.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel, the **conflict in northern Mali is seriously exacerbating the crisis** with mass displacements of people both within Mali and into neighboring countries which are already struggling to respond to the food crisis: Burkina Faso (38,800), Mauritania (54,100), Niger (50,000) and others. Overall 148,464 refugees have fled Mali and an estimated 228,920 people (IDP) remain displaced within their own country.

### Prevention, Resilience and Early Warning

Governments in Mali, Niger and Chad have outlined programs to help counteract reduced food production and have begun appealing to donors and technical partners for assistance. However, the majority of these interventions aim to address food shortages, not longer-term needs. In order to address the longer-term food security needs of those affected by



the crisis, agencies, including CARE, are engaged in advocacy efforts to promote the scaling-up of social safety net programs and the recognition of food insecurity as a structural, long-term development challenge.

## CARE's Response

### *Regional Synergies*

**CARE is well-positioned in Chad, Niger and Mali** and works in **several remote and insecure communities** of these three countries. Our country offices have strong linkages to the affected communities and the capacity to undertake both short-term emergency interventions and longer-term recovery and resilience programming. These assets position CARE to credibly speak about the crisis from a regional perspective and identify linkages and cross-cutting themes throughout the region.

Secondly, CARE has **sectoral interventions** across the region, with a focus on food security/nutrition; livelihoods; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). While the approaches differ according to context, there are important synergies between these interventions given the overlapping sectors, cross-border elements and emphasis on longer-term resilience. CARE's global sector specialists play a key role in ensuring consistency between the three countries in terms of the overall response.

Furthermore, our **interventions are built on existing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and resilience programming** in vulnerable communities, with the emphasis on reducing communities' vulnerability to recurrent shocks in the longer-term. In our humanitarian work, we aim to meet immediate needs and strengthen communities' capacity to cope with future shocks, by avoiding interventions that increase dependency. Evidence from CARE's Village Saving and Loan Groups (Mata Masu Dubara, or "Women on the move") in Niger has

demonstrated the effectiveness of climate-risk resilient strategies.

In addition, CARE is **building on experience in working with partners** in response to the crisis, including other INGOs, UN agencies, local NGO partners and local government officials (where appropriate). Partnerships are essential not only to reinforcing existing relationships, but also to ensuring that CARE's actions are sustainable in the longer-term. Partnerships will enable CARE to reach those in need even where access constraints are a reality. Particular attention to the unique accountability challenges of such programming will be an important consideration for the response and this is critical in northern Mali and Chad.

Finally, CARE is **seeking to assist people in their areas of origin depending on security**, recognizing that such an approach, wherever feasible, helps to ensure that people are not required to move great distances in order to seek assistance. This is particularly important as the most vulnerable are often the ones left behind. It will also enable CARE to support and reinforce existing coping mechanisms of communities over the short and medium-term. This is an important component of supporting longer-term recovery of affected populations. At the same time, **CARE is providing essential WASH, nutrition, food and non-food assistance to those displaced by the current crisis, including both refugees, internally displaced people (IDP) as well as host communities.** The provision of life-saving assistance to those forced to flee their areas of origin recognizes that displacement and forced migration both continue to be significant consequences of the drought and conflict in the region and cannot be overlooked. CARE is undertaking interventions in support of refugees, IDPs and their host communities in order to minimize conflicts between communities as a result of CARE's intervention.





### Cross-cutting issues

CARE will also seek to ensure that a number of cross-cutting issues are considered in the response in all three countries, including protection, gender, DRR, climate change adaptation (environmental considerations) and conflict-sensitivity.

### Transition and Longer-Term Resilience Strategy

CARE links Country Offices' emergency strategies to a longer-term livelihoods and food security strategy for the Sahel, focused on reducing recurrent acute food insecurity through livelihoods interventions, climate change adaptation, interventions that promote drought resilience and ongoing efforts in disaster risk reduction in the most affected areas. Attention to marginal communities and the critical role of women in realizing food security for themselves and their children will be prioritized.

Chronic food insecurity in the region requires a more permanent response, including the active role of governments as well as improved governance and stability in the region. CARE and its partners have an important role to play in advocating for the necessary structural and policy changes needed to

improve the lives of vulnerable communities in the region. At the same time, we will have a multi-faceted strategy and a broad systems perspective aimed at both reducing the multiple risks of a crisis and improving rapid coping and adaptation mechanisms at local, national and regional levels. Strengthening resilience lies at the interface of humanitarian and development assistance. CARE will put in place a long-term approach based on addressing the underlying causes of crises and enhancing community's capacity to manage future uncertainty and crises. In addition, CARE will work to improve households' incomes and food security by undertaking income generating activities, skills training and scaling-up community-managed DRR and climate change adaptation interventions.

Meanwhile, CARE will give consideration to the possible needs of returnees who elect to return to their areas of origin in the medium-term. Ensuring that sufficient support is in place to enable their safe and sustainable return and reintegration will be essential.

<sup>1</sup> Oxfam, 2012 Sahel Food Crisis: Protecting communities and breaking the hunger cycle, January 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Oxfam, 2012 Sahel Food Crisis: Protecting communities and breaking the hunger cycle, January 2012.

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Founded in 1945, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty and providing lifesaving assistance in emergencies. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to help lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year, CARE worked in 84 countries around the world and assisted more than 83 million people as they worked to improve basic health and education, fight hunger, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity, confront climate change and recover from disasters. To learn more, visit [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).

