

United Aid agencies call for a 'surge' in aid effort to help 10 million facing hunger in West Africa

Tearfund have joined 9 other leading aid agencies calling for a 'surge' in humanitarian efforts to help 10 million people at risk of acute hunger across the Sahel region of West and Central Africa.

“In Niger, seven million people do not have enough food. Two million people in Chad, and hundreds of thousands more in Mali, Mauritania, parts of Burkina Faso and the extreme north of Nigeria are also suffering as a result of the crisis.” Said Tearfund's Voluntary Media Officer, Pembrokeshire, Sharron Hardwick.

Tearfund with ACF, Care International, Oxfam, Save the Children, CAFOD, Concern, Plan UK, Christian Aid and World Vision, said: “Nearly 17 per cent of children under five suffering from acute malnutrition, over a third higher than the number last year, underlines the need to act immediately.”

Despite over six months of warnings, funding for the crisis has been paltry and slow. Some countries have increased support, but others have been slower and less generous. With UN appeal for Niger targets behind by \$107 million, the aid agencies call on rich countries to give generously and immediately in order to prevent a catastrophe, and to engage at highest political levels to overcome current delays in the delivery of aid.

Delays in funding resulted in the late purchase and delivery of food to the affected areas. In Niger, for example, World Food Programme (WFP) distributions started too late and with a reduced number of people receiving food aid. On 2nd July WFP announced it will increase the number of people it is helping in Niger from 2 to 4.5 million in the face of the appalling new malnutrition figures. In Chad, where the WFP needs an extra \$20 million, food distributions are only planned for only 2 months - yet as in Niger, it will take more than 3 months for the next harvest to be ready.

Kirsty Hughes, Oxfam said: "In parts of the Sahel, people are scavenging for wild leaves and seeds, and drinking dirty water. Whole villages are starving and desperate for food with children, nursing mothers, and the elderly particularly at risk. In aid ministries around the world, they know this is happening, they know what needs to happen, and they know that the last time there was a slow response to a major food crisis there in 2005, delays cost lives and it took years for people to recover. The question is: Why don't you act?"

Drought, crop failure, pest infestations, increases in food prices and abject levels of poverty have triggered severe food shortages and poor grazing land, forcing people to leave their homes, and sell or kill their starving livestock and their meagre possessions. Such desperate measures not only indicate the depth of the crisis but also undermine investment in long-term development, the aid agencies warn.

“Please pray for all affected by the food crisis, the aid agencies trying to help and for swift and long term support, so that people's lives can be saved. Together we can make a difference.” asks Sharron Hardwick

If you would like to help please call: 0845 355 8355 or visit www.tearfund.org

