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NIGER: Acting Urgently for More than 4.5 Million People in Need of Humanitarian Assistance in 2024

This note aims to draw the attention of decision-makers and humanitarian and development actors to the measures to be taken in response to humanitarian needs, particularly food and nutrition insecurity.

Niger faces multiple and interconnected crises of chronic food insecurity, conflicts on the southeastern and western borders, floods, climate change impacts, structural poverty, and poor basic social services. These have recently compounded by sanctions imposed on the country following the coup d'état of July 26, 2023. The deterioration of the security situation in the regions of Tillabéry, Diffa, Tahoua and Maradi and cross-border movements have forced more than 700,000 people into forced displacement within the country. It is estimated that by 2024, 4.5 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance.

1. Food and nutrition situation

The results of the **Cadre Harmonisé [2]** of November 2023 indicate high levels of food insecurity, with currently **2.3 million** people in food crisis. That is more than double of the number of people affected at the same period of time in 2022. **Half of them are children.** The situation is likely to worsen further during the 2024 lean season, with potentially **3.2 million people unable to meet their food and nutrition needs** (2.9 million more than in 2023).

The nutritional situation remains worrying. From August to October 2023 alone, more than 258,000 acutely malnourished children have been admitted to health services, including more than 111,000 severe cases. Approximately 76% of CRENAMs [3] are out of stock or pre-out of stocks of essential inputs for the treatment of malnutrition. It is estimated that about 118,000 children are not receiving care due to lack of nutritional inputs. This could slide towards an estimated increase of 40,000 severely malnourished children in Q4 2023, an effect that will continue into Q1 2024.

This food and nutrition situation is exacerbated by:

- Cereal production in 2023 14% decrease compared to 2022, and 4% compared to the average of the last five years;
- Overall poor fodder production in 2023, especially in pastoral areas;
- The continued disruption of market functioning in certain areas of the Diffa, Tillabéry, Tahoua and Maradi regions leading to significant increases in food prices;
- Cyclical and protracted crises related to climate change and displacement dynamics that increase people's vulnerability.

1.2 million people – nearly 65% of the 1.9 million people targeted in the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) [4] – are not receiving life-saving assistance due to ongoing financial constraints. The resources available are enough to help only 700,000 people (37% of HRP's target) until the end of 2023. There is an urgent need for US\$30 million to address food insecurity by the end of 2023.

The socio-political situation since July 26, 2023, has not changed significantly with the continuation of the suspension of trade and financial relations measures imposed by ECOWAS and UEMOA, as well as the borders with Benin and Nigeria which remain closed by the Nigerien authorities. The suspension of development aid will have a significant impact on Nigerien people's access to basic social services such as education and health.

[1] Global Humanitarian Overview 2024 - <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2024/article/niger-1>

[2] Harmonized Framework for the Identification of Risk Areas and Populations in Food and Nutrition Insecurity - https://oiren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Note_decideurs_CadreHarmonise_Nov2023_Niger_VFF.pdf

[3] Outpatient Nutritional Recovery Center for Moderate Malnutrition

2. Access to basic social services.

Border closures have led to a blockage in supplies of medicines, vaccines, and essential inputs. This situation causes a shortage of medicines, reduces access to health care and services for vulnerable populations with a risk of increased morbidity and mortality, especially in areas with limited access due to the security situation.

More than 1 million school-age children are affected by the humanitarian crisis in the regions of Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua and Tillabéry. To date, 987 schools remain closed due to insecurity, with more than 87,000 students out of school. The reduction in financial support for education is likely to impact more than 50,000 teachers, which is likely to affect teacher retention.

The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector is currently 54% funded (US\$13.8 million of the US\$25.5 million needed). The ongoing economic and financial sanctions have led to an increase in the cost of purchasing the various essential items for emergency responses in WASH. These are items such as water treatment products and various hygiene kits. Such an increase would come from inflation triggered by the closure of certain land borders, but also by the temporary halt of the activities of certain partners following the suspension of donor development aid [5].

These various shocks contribute to an erosion of the protection of communities. More than 1,200,000 vulnerable people could remain without protection assistance. As of 30 September 2023, due to low funding and restrictions on humanitarian access, humanitarian actors have only been able to provide a protection response to 216,243 people, representing only 26% of those targeted by the HRP [6].

3. Recommendations

To the Government of Niger:

- Continue and strengthen the operation "**sale of cereals at moderate prices**" in areas of production deficit and areas under a state of emergency,
- Facilitate and guarantee the delivery of aid by land and air in order to support activities that meet the basic needs of vulnerable populations in Niger. This is reflected in the opening of Niger's land border with Nigeria and Benin for the passage of humanitarian aid.
- Facilitate access for humanitarian workers wherever needed, especially in hard-to-reach areas.

To ECOWAS and its Member States:

- We reiterate our call on ECOWAS and its Member States to formally introduce humanitarian exemptions into the sanctions regime against Niger. This must be achieved through the unhindered delivery of goods and commodities essential for humanitarian assistance and the authorization of all commercial and financial transactions necessary for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Niger.

To Donors:

- It is imperative that donors **who have suspended or reduced their financial support review their decision to allow those working with vulnerable populations to meet at least the needs expressed in the humanitarian response plan.**
- Development donors are encouraged to adopt financing strategies that give greater priority to people's access to basic social services. Humanitarian and development NGOs can also play a role in maintaining basic social services if they obtain funding that allows them to develop long-term intervention logics aimed at strengthening local actors and communities in the delivery of services.

[4] <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-mars-2023>

[5] OCHA/ Impact of ECOWAS sanctions on humanitarian action in Niger /31 October 2023

[6] https://oiren.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Protection_Analysis_Update_Niger_Novembre_2023.pdf

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