

An unprecedented food crisis in Mali

Address urgent needs and prevent further deterioration

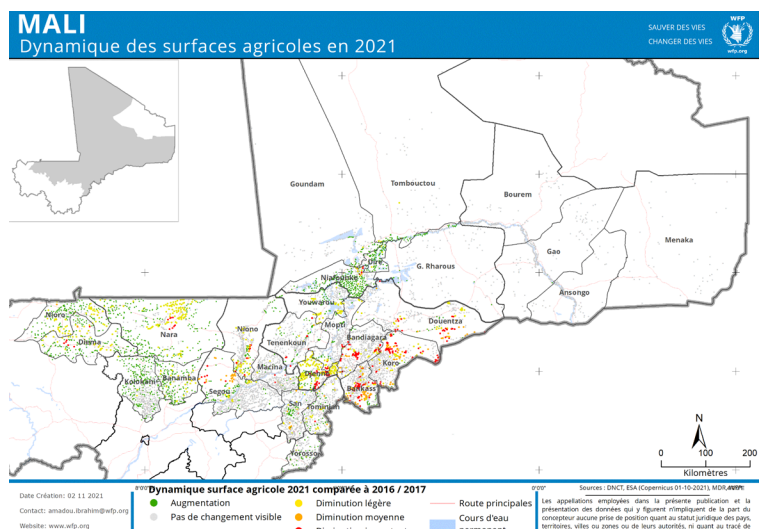
Mali is facing an unprecedented food crisis, exceeding the last peak in 2013/2014 at the beginning of the crisis. From October to December 2021, nearly 1.2 million people were known to be in need of emergency food assistance (phase 3 & 4),¹ almost three times higher than the year before.²

By June 2022, the number of people in need of emergency assistance is likely to reach more than 1.8 million people if nothing is done to drastically improve the response. This includes the mobilisation of the necessary short and long-term funding. The explosion of the food crisis is part of a trend in the wider humanitarian crisis with nearly 6.3 million Malians in need of emergency assistance to access food and nutrition, water, health, education, protection, shelter.³

1. Insecurity and climatic shocks, two major causes of the explosion of the food crisis in Mali

The expansion of insecurity into central and southern Mali is one of the major causes leading to this deterioration. The number of people forced to flee violence has increased by almost 40% in one year.⁴ More than 114,000 Malians have been forced to abandon their livelihoods between September 2020 and 2021, and there are now more than 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs)⁵ who still depend mainly on humanitarian aid, local solidarity and mutual aid mechanisms to survive.

Violence has also led to significant restrictions on movement, disrupting economic activities and limiting access to fields and grazing areas, resulting in the abandonment of fields or crops. Satellite analyses for 2019, 2020 and 2021 show a correlation between the dynamics of a reduction in cultivable areas compared to 2016-2017, and the expansion of insecurity, particularly in the centre. The Mopti region is the most affected in 2021, with almost a quarter (23%) of its localities experiencing a reduction in cultivated agricultural land. The most affected circles are Bankass (24% of localities), Koro (20%), Djenne (13%) and Bandiagara (11%). In the regions of Mopti and Ségou, almost 254,000 people are affected by this reduction in cultivated agricultural land (7% and



1 According to the November 2021 Harmonized Framework communication sheet for Mali

2 Specifically, an increase of 185% from 437,067 people in phases 3&4 in October-December 2020 to 1,244,906 people in phases 3&4 in October-December 2021

3 Global Humanitarian Overview 2022

4 From 287,496 IDPs at end of September 2020 to 401,736 at end of September 2021, see <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/mli>

5 DTM September 2021

I experienced the blockade in my village in Dinangourou. It all started one morning when I took my daba to the field. On the road, while I was talking with another women, I felt a great panic in the village. Everyone was looking for shelter. So I ran home. For months we were forbidden to cross certain boundaries in our own village. My biggest concern was feeding my eight children. We managed with the little food we had in reserve. We had no activity. When my husband left the house, I was very worried because his return was uncertain. We are now trying to get back on our feet and we are asking for help to get food and to go back to our village.

Displaced woman from Dinangourou, November 2021

2% of the populations of Mopti and Ségou respectively). More than a hundred affected villages have difficulties accessing fields due to the distance. In these localities, only fields within a radius of 550 m to 2 km of the village are still being cultivated, while fields previously extending up to 10 km are being abandoned.⁶

Cases of blockades of entire villages by armed groups continued during 2021, with the blockade of Farabougou being extended for more than a year. New villages such as Dinangourou in early May 2021 and Marebougou in November 2021 were also concerned. Even in the case of Dinangourou, where movement restrictions have been lifted, people have missed the cropping season and the blockade has deprived seasonal workers of their main source of income. The resulting high level of vulnerability has been compounded by a lack of access to health services, leading to fears of increased mortality and epidemic risks.⁷

In addition to the devastating impact of the conflicts, there are major climatic shocks and the economic impact of COVID-19. Drought (at the beginning of the season and especially at the end of September 2021) in the country have resulted in the loss of more than 225,000 ha of fields⁸ and affected 3,055,253 vulnerable people. The shortening of the rainy season has prevented the renewal of pastures in many parts of the country. These came in addition to movement restrictions and thefts of livestock related to insecurity. All of this has led to significant concentrations of animals in certain regions and risks resulting in the degradation of fodder resources in 2022, increasing the risks of spreading livestock diseases and causing renewed tensions between herders and farmers.⁹

2. Insufficient responses to meet urgent needs and stem the food crisis

2.1. Urgent needs over the next three months

In the face of this deterioration, the humanitarian response is inadequate and the funding available will not allow to meet urgent needs. The government is working to meet the needs of the 1,841,067 people in crisis phase through the 2022 National Response Plan. However, given the scale of the crisis in the current period, an immediate response is needed to provide assistance to the 1.2 million people (including IDPs), especially in the circles most affected by the crisis (Bandiagara, Douentza, Koro, Niono, Ansongo, Ménaka). **The cost to cover 100% of the urgent food needs of these households for the next three months is estimated at nearly US\$ 65 million.**

2.2. Increase and improve 2022 humanitarian response

Beyond the emergency response over the next three months, it is also essential to improve our humanitarian food security responses over 2022. First of all, this requires putting an end to the gap that has only widened since 2018 between the explosion in the number of people in food crisis and the humanitarian funding allocated to respond to it. While the number of people in food crisis has increased almost sevenfold between 2018 and 2021, the coverage of food security funding needs has halved from 47.5% of requested funding in 2018 to only 25% in November 2021. The consequence of this lack of funding has had a direct impact on the response, with almost 300,000 people in food crisis not receiving any humanitarian assistance in 2021. There is also a need to improve assistance to the most vulnerable, providing holistic responses and going beyond 6 months to allow beneficiaries to gradually rebuild their livelihoods.

In addition, there are coordination challenges between donors and humanitarian actors, which result in unequal coverage of urgent needs. In October 2021, some regions, such as Gao and Kidal, had 100% coverage of needs, while in others, such as Mopti and Kayes, coverage was only 62%. Similarly, the humanitarian response is still heavily focused on internally displaced people alone. In the multi-sectoral assessment conducted by REACH at national level in July 2021, 53% of displaced households said they had received humanitarian assistance in the last 12 months, while 81% of non-displaced households said they had not received any assistance in the same period. While displaced households are often among the most vulnerable populations, they represent only 7% of the total number of people in food crisis (phase 3 & 4).

⁶ of Rural Development and WFP, Mali - Analysis of satellite images on the dynamics of agricultural land in hard-to-reach areas (insecurity) in 2021.

⁷ Solidarités International, Strategic Information Management, Dinangourou situation reports, Koro, Mopti, 16 August and 16 September 2021

⁸ GTPA, October 2021

⁹ Alou DIAKITE, Erwann FILLLOL, Action Contre la Faim, Mali, Biomass production in 2021, analyzes and perspectives for 2022, September 2021

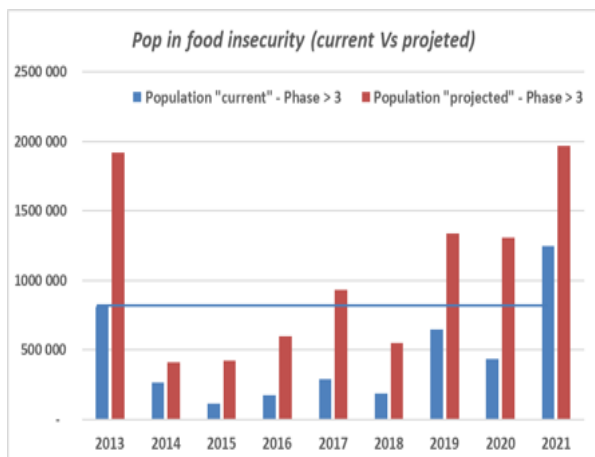


Figure 1 Source: Food insecurity Harmonized Framework

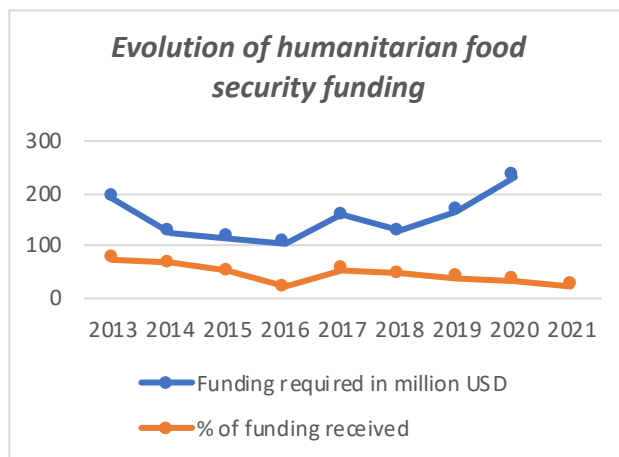


Figure 2 Source: Financial Tracking Service (OCHA)

2.3. The urgent need for a stronger commitment from donors in the development sector

Resilience or early recovery responses that support households beyond emergency responses are only marginally supported by humanitarian donors who, due to lack of funding, are increasingly focusing on very short-term responses to immediate shocks. In 2021, only 34% of those identified as needing livelihood support were covered by humanitarian donors. Some donors have also withdrawn from funding the lean season response without development donors taking over. The lean season response was therefore not able to play its role as a social safety net and was unable to prevent the most vulnerable from falling into food crises. This trend is likely to continue to worsen unless development donors increase their commitment to cover social safety net approaches, including lean season responses.

In addition to the emergency and lean season response, it is essential that donors make a significant commitment, alongside the government, to fund responses that enable crisis-affected populations to develop new livelihoods adapted to the context of conflict and climate change, and that strengthen the resilience of the 3.6 million people under food stress. It is also crucial to systematically integrate mitigation, preparedness and contingency approaches to security, climate and epidemic shocks throughout the country, as well as flexible tools within projects to adapt the response to shocks. If this type of response is not significantly scaled up in 2022, many households will be at risk of resorting to negative coping strategies that will deteriorate their access to food in the short term and their livelihoods in the medium to long term.

3. Recommendations

To respond to and stem the exponential rise in food and nutrition insecurity in Mali, it is urgent that:

- **Donors release US\$ 65 million in immediate food and nutrition assistance to directly address the needs of the 1.2 million most vulnerable people over the next three months.**

- **Humanitarian donors are significantly increasing their funding for the humanitarian food security response for 2022 and the regional Pool of Funds is urgently releasing funding for Mali.** The emergency response should include:

- ☞ **Support to the rapid response mechanism** for unconditional food and nutrition assistance based on vulnerabilities;
- ☞ **Support to emergency food production for the most vulnerable affected by shocks.** This can be done by empowering affected households to maintain or restart their food production or to access food through market purchases by strengthening their livelihoods;
- ☞ **Innovative, contextualised strategies with a strong community base,** such as cereal banks, support to community solidarity systems, cash transfers;
- ☞ **Integrated assistance packages** that take into account food security, nutrition, WASH and protection activities as a minimum, for greater effectiveness;
- ☞ **Strategies for community integration and participation in defining the emergency response.**

- **Humanitarian and government actors ensure that all their emergency responses are made directly to the most vulnerable populations** based on clearly defined vulnerability criteria and **strengthen and homogenise the quality** of their responses **in line with SPHERE and government standards.**

- **Humanitarian and development donors agree on joint strategic and operational planning to ensure a more balanced geographical and temporal distribution** (from emergency to the reconstruction of livelihoods adapted to the context) of funding & responses and to limit gaps.

- **Development donors commit to systematically funding early recovery and resilience-building responses** that are flexible to the context of conflict and climate shocks and coordinated with humanitarian responses and donors. These approaches should include :
 - ↳ **Social safety net approaches that are adaptable to the volatile context**, including hunger nets;
 - ↳ **Approaches that allow for a transition from emergency assistance (food aid, cash, etc.) to early recovery**, such as the development of income-generating activities and village savings and micro-credits;
 - ↳ **Approaches that are sensitive to conflict dynamics**, particularly intercommunity conflict, and adapted to the volatile security context;
 - ↳ **Approaches that support displaced people and host communities and promote social cohesion** and integration;
 - ↳ **Approaches that support local actors (agro pastoral and traditional organisations, communities) and existing systems of solidarity and adaptation to local shocks**;
 - ↳ **Approaches to mitigation, preparation and contingency to security, climate and epidemic shocks** (human and animal health) as well as the systematic implementation of crisis modifiers to adapt medium and long-term responses to shocks;
 - ↳ **Agricultural and pastoral approaches adapted to the environmental impacts** of climate change, the specific environments and capacities of farmers and herders.