



## Joint News Release

5 August 2021

# JOINT EFFORTS TO FIGHT HUNGER IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

**MAIDUGURI** – Hunger is on the rise worldwide. The combination of conflict, COVID-19, increased food prices and the effects of climate change are decimating livelihoods and people’s access to food. Across the world, high levels of food insecurity are in danger of deteriorating into catastrophic conditions, unless this is urgently addressed. Millions of people are at risk.

### ***North-east Nigeria is on the brink of catastrophic food insecurity***

In north-east Nigeria, the outlook is dire. Without sustained humanitarian assistance in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, millions will struggle to feed themselves during this critical 2021 lean season. According to the March 2021 [Cadre Harmonisé](#) food security assessment, an estimated 4.4 million people, including internally displaced people, are expected to face critical food shortages. Some 775,000 people are at extreme risk of catastrophic food insecurity—the worst outlook in 4 years.

The humanitarian community, the United Nations and non-governmental organisations, have joined efforts to address the rapidly deteriorating food insecurity situation in the north-east, working closely with the Government of Nigeria at federal and state levels.

“The humanitarian community is deeply concerned by the alarming food insecurity in north-east Nigeria. Levels of food insecurity today are similar to 2016-17, when the crisis was at its worst. The U.N. and its non-governmental partners are working with the Government to respond to this growing threat of catastrophic food insecurity,” said Edward Kallon, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria.

“Women in affected communities have shared stories of sleepless children who cry through the night due to hunger,” said Mr. Kallon. Conditions for some households are so desperate that families are living on nutritional supplements meant to ensure the survival of their children. The nutrition situation is at risk of deteriorating to critical levels due to persistent and poor underlying conditions, including inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene and limited health access.

### ***Climate change, the ongoing conflict and its impact on food security***

The situation may likely worsen during the rainy season if diseases like cholera and malaria are not prevented or controlled.

The insecurity plaguing north-east Nigeria, intense rains, flash flooding and periods of drought are some factors preventing farmers from accessing their fields and growing crops. They are doubly impacted by the food insecurity, not only losing their ability to grow food they need to feed their families but also suffering the loss of income from not being able to yield a harvest. Solving food insecurity must be approached as a long-term effort that requires enabling people to have livelihoods through agriculture, and supporting them through capital and agricultural inputs.

The worst affected during the lean season are women and children. A considerable percentage of the affected people are female-headed households, who depend on farming to provide for their families. They are facing the impossible dilemma of needing to earn a living while simultaneously placing themselves at risk of sexual violence by collecting firewood or going to the open fields for farming activities—areas that are well outside the relative safety and protection of their communities.

“Parents are taking their children out of school to beg in order to survive. This exposes children, especially girls to the risk of trafficking, rape, and sexual harassment,” said Mr. Kallon. “Women have shared that they resort to eating grass.” This illustrates the levels of desperation early in the lean season. Domestic and sexual violence is on the rise, as men struggle to provide for their families, taking their frustrations out on the family. Women and young girls are also forced into child labour, child marriage and transactional sex for food and survival.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation has also deepened vulnerabilities. In addition to losing livelihoods, people have had to cope with decimation of their incomes and increased food prices. For many people across the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, they can no longer afford to buy food.

“We have been able to avert catastrophic food insecurity in the past by working together, and we can do it again given the resources required. We are grateful to our donors and partners for their generous support. Our operational plan sets out the requirement of USD\$250 million for immediate action. We desperately need the funding now to urgently save lives,” said Edward Kallon.

***Link to multimedia assets (b-roll and images from agencies in action): [b-roll](#), [photos](#).***

## ***Background***

### ***Joint efforts to fight catastrophic food insecurity***

Members of the humanitarian community have formed an in-country taskforce to respond to the crisis and prevent catastrophic food insecurity that would push the north-east over the edge. The Task Force is coordinating and working with the Government to implement a comprehensive and robust operational plan, guided by an intersectoral response involving Food Security, Nutrition, Health, Protection and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

The implementation of the plan leverages existing mechanisms and teams to ensure communities that are hardest-to-reach receive the immediate food and nutrition assistance they need. The Task Force oversees operational teams deployed to at-risk communities, as they tackle issues related to logistics, the volume of assistance needed, speed of delivery and access to affected people, while ensuring that all activities conform to best practices in terms of accountability to affected people, gender, age and disability concerns.

The Task Force will ensure that preventative actions are taken to increase awareness and reduce the opportunities for the exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable families.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Malnutrition Analysis (IPC AMN) of March 2021, the number of acutely malnourished children and women is expected to significantly increase during the 2021 lean season, with some 1.15 million children and over 124,000 women projected to be acutely malnourished. This will be the highest levels of women and children at risk since 2017, when the crisis was at its peak.

More than a quarter of households in the north-east are food insecure. To cope with hunger, families are forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms—reducing the number and quantity of meals fed to their families, selling remaining assets, borrowing money and food among others, pushing them deeper into a cycle of hunger, malnutrition, vulnerability and despair.

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**Editor's note:** Members of the joint taskforce are agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and the World Food Programme (WFP), along with non-governmental partners Action Against Hunger/Action contre le faim (ACF), CARE International, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), and Save the Children.

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