

# LAKE CHAD BASIN CRISIS

A CONTINUED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS OVER FOUR COUNTRIES



# PUT PEOPLE FIRST!

17 million people living in affected areas

10.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance

2.4 million people are displaced, including 1.5 million children

7.2 million people are severely food insecure

515 000 children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition

Emergency situation (IPC Phase 4) in large areas with a continued risk of famine (IPC Phase 5) in inaccessible areas<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Fewsnet, Nigeria food security outlook, June 2017 to January 2018



**ACTION  
AGAINST  
HUNGER**

## Action Against Hunger Key Messages

### Better protection by upholding International Humanitarian Law and other relevant international norms

- Action Against Hunger calls for the **protection of civilians to be at the heart of any action in the region**, in particular in the conduct of hostilities and displacement. Protection programming must be as well mainstreamed in all humanitarian interventions.
- Action Against Hunger calls for **all parties including States to uphold international humanitarian law, principles and standards, and to promote and defend them internally in their intervention as well as externally towards all actors, including in the frame of the fight against terrorism.**
- Action Against Hunger calls for all States to **halt returns of refugees and IDPs to areas with no adequate access to basic services and safety.** Returns must be voluntary, informed and dignified, with basic services available in areas of returns.
- Action Against Hunger calls on **UNHCR to actively defend and closely monitor refugees' rights** in the context of safe, dignified and voluntary returns.

### Greater humanitarian access and respect of humanitarian principles

- Action Against Hunger calls on all parties to enable the **safe, unhindered and rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance.**
- Action Against Hunger calls for a better implementation of the “**do no harm**” principle and for assistance to be delivered solely based on needs, regardless of the status of being a refugee, an IDP, a host, or living inside or outside a camp.
- Action Against Hunger calls for a **better coordination of the response**, including by enhancing dialogue with security forces to ensure a clear distinction between humanitarian and military mandates, and to facilitate the unhindered delivery of aid wherever it is needed.

### Increased humanitarian response, coordination and funding

- In light of the unprecedented levels of undernutrition and the risk for future generations of the region, Action Against Hunger calls for a **major nutrition and health response from Governments** and the various health and nutrition actors to immediately **scale up the treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition.**
- Action Against Hunger calls for donors to effectively disburse the funds pledged during the Oslo Conference in February 2017, to **increase funding for all four Humanitarian Response Plans and to invest for development programming.**
- Action Against Hunger calls for **quicker, more flexible funding and pre-positioning of relief materials** to intervene as areas become accessible and for donors to support operational costs, especially those related to ensuring the security of programs and staff.
- Action Against Hunger calls for all actors to significantly scale up the response to people's needs, from supporting urgent basic services to early recovery and **longer-term development programs.** Humanitarian actors should **include livelihoods, economic and social support in all of their programming** to prevent dependency to aid and tackle the underlying and interlinked causes of the crisis.

# SECURITY SITUATION, HUMANITARIAN ACCESS AND RESPONSE

## WORDS FROM ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S FIELD TEAMS

The conflict between security forces and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad has intensified over the past 8 years, leading to widespread displacement, violations of international humanitarian law, and an escalating humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian needs are not met, especially because of lack of financing, and the situation of vulnerable populations continue to deteriorate.

Action Against Hunger raises the alarm on this still too silent tragedy viewing the scale of the crisis, by exposing the facts and giving voice to its field staff from the four countries.

### High level of insecurity and lack of humanitarian access

#### ➤ Continued military operations and insecurity

The violent conflict between security forces and armed opposition groups in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad continues throughout 2017. The security situation remains particularly volatile due to recurrent attacks, including frequent suicide bombings by armed groups, and ongoing military operations. This leads to continued violations of International Humanitarian Law with major consequences on the civilian populations, their livelihoods, infrastructures necessary to their survival and economy of the area; making the people more dependent on aid. Attacks from armed groups as military operations are limiting access, provoking displacements of people, closure of schools and some health centers.

Action Against Hunger's field teams in Nigeria testify: *"There are still armed clashes in some of our areas of operations which prevented us from deploying our teams for a few days. It's happening regularly, minimum once a month in this area. Activities usually resume after 2 to 3 days depending on our assessment and time to get clearance from security forces to resume movement in this area."* There has also been a recent increase in attacks in Niger's South-Eastern Diffa region, with military operations against Boko Haram by the Multinational Joint Task Force. *"The most significant example is the suicide bombing attack in Kablewa IDP camp last June 29, that has led to the displacement of 16 500 IDPs to a new site (to this date, no durable solutions were found for the displaced who used to seek refuge in the camp). N'Galewa was attacked three days later causing the death of nine people and the abduction of 39 women and children. In Cameroon as well, "sweep operations involve a significant number of arrests and raids in some villages which are not targeted by armed groups, hence presumed to be supporters".*

#### ➤ Lack of humanitarian access

Access to many zones depends on authorizations from military forces, which tend to further restrict an already challenging humanitarian access. The continuing crisis is testimony that current approaches have failed to provide access to safety and life-saving services for civilians. Instead, military operations have hindered principled humanitarian action, further exacerbating humanitarian needs, as well as feelings of fear, mistrust or resentment. For AAH field staff in Nigeria, *"In Nigeria, humanitarian assistance is currently concentrated on*

*Local Government Headquarters and smaller towns with military authorities currently not permitting humanitarian and civilian movement outside of these areas". In Niger, the team reports that: "since May 2015, access to eastern Diffa (Bosso), to areas along the Komadougou River and to the islands of Lake Chad has been limited due to the ongoing military operations. These operations have restricted the humanitarian space for NGOs in terms of gaining access to those most in need."*

Civilians should not be targeted, but rather protected. Governments must live up to their obligation to protect and assist their citizens. Additionally, Governments should facilitate immediate and unimpeded access for principled humanitarian actors to affected populations to conduct assessments and provide life-saving assistance (staff and supplies). In Cameroon, *"in the Logone and Chari districts, because of high insecurity and mobilization of security forces, a reluctance to let humanitarians access and assist populations wherever they are has been observed several times these last few months humanitarian actors."* The lack of access for humanitarian organizations is also exacerbated by administrative obstacles (for e.g. regulatory challenges in Nigeria such as the challenges obtaining visas conferring right to residency and employment).

➤ **Lack of information in areas that are not accessible to humanitarian actors:**

Humanitarian needs are clearly identified in accessible zones, but as many others are still inaccessible, there is a suspicion of extremely high needs for population deprived from any humanitarian support. In Chad and Cameroon, AAH teams underline that *"The needs in accessible areas are well known, even though they are not always covered. But in non-accessible zones, we know very little."* The same applies in Niger: *"NGOs should be able to access these areas to assess the needs and appropriately respond to them. The relevant authorities (Ministry of the Interior, Governor) should open a corridor, for the islands in particular. If required, issue access permits so that NGOs can provide life-saving assistance."*

## **Movements of population throughout the region**

➤ **Continued displacement in all four countries**

New population displacements regularly occur within and between countries, which means a continuous flow of arrivals in NGOs' areas of intervention. In Cameroon, *"the continuous degradation of the security situation in Mayo Sava in the first quarter of the year has triggered more movements of population."* In Chad, *"military operations have pushed many people out of their homes preventively due to fear of combats, for example in the Bagasola district. Additionally, ongoing offensives in the islands and changes in military positions triggered movements of the population which no longer feels protected in their homes. We are expecting a new wave of displacements, especially after higher risk of kamikaze attacks."* Cross-border movements have recently been reported: in July, more than 6,000 people were forced to flee Niger to Chad due to attacks in their villages.

### ➤ Forced returns among refugees and IDPs

Cases of forced displacement or forced relocation by military actors and the illegal return of asylum seekers or persons unable to prove their nationality are numerous. Notably, there is a serious problem of forced displacements from camps in Cameroon (Minawao) towards camps in Nigeria where minimum standards for basic services are not met, as noted by several reports<sup>2</sup>. *“IDPs have been forcibly moved from camps in Cameroon to camps in Nigeria that are inadequate in terms of emergency standards: shelter, water, food and health services are not sufficient to meet the needs of the current population of these camps. IDPs were being told that their home is safe and that they can return home, even when this information is not accurate. There are also reports of authorities tricking or threatening people into returning home or to their nearest LGA.”* In Niger, *“refugees located in the “red zone” were forced to move to Sayam Forage camp). Where people refused to move, NGOs were prohibited from gaining access and assisting them.”* Returns can only take place in conditions of safety and dignity, and measures must be put in place to ensure that people receive adequate protection and assistance during transport and in their areas of returns. All returns must be voluntary, which implies transparent information being shared on conditions and situation in areas of return.

### ➤ Tensions between hosts, IDPs and refugees over resources & aid.

The situation between displaced people and hosting communities is deteriorating, especially around water exploitation in Chad and Niger. Entire families of the region have fled armed conflict, been displaced multiple times, lived in numerous dwellings and often been hosted for several years by the surrounding communities. Cases of growing tensions over scarce resources between IDPs and host populations are not rare, especially regarding access to limited water. Yet, humanitarian aid can greatly differ between those two populations, with hosting villages not receiving any support. Current responses favouring the displaced over host communities are creating tensions: more attention must be paid to the Do no harm principles and conflict sensitivity. In Nigeria, *“some organizations when progressively pulling back only targeted refugees”*, as in Niger, *“IDPs denounce a selective and unfair humanitarian assistance compared to what is provided to refugees”*. Everyone in need must be able to access humanitarian aid based on needs and vulnerability criteria.

## Humanitarian response, coordination and financing

### ➤ High humanitarian needs unmet

Despite the overwhelming crisis, the response to the human suffering remains woefully inadequate. If the best way to limit the needs would be to protect civilians from the harm caused by the fighting or counter-insurgency strategies, humanitarian response remains as well largely insufficient in each country of the Lake Chad Basin. The Governments of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, with the support and expertise of donors, the UN, and NGOs, must continue to scale up the response to this crisis and

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<sup>2</sup> *“Involuntary refugee returns to Nigeria must be avoided”*, UNHCR, 29 June 2017: <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2017/6/5954bedb4/involuntary-refugee-returns-nigeria-must-avoided-unhcr.html>

effectively provide aid to their populations, especially during the coming upwelling of Chad Lake when populations in most need are trapped without any basic services. The whole region is suffering from an economic and livelihood crisis, which will have a long-term impact on the development of the region. Action Against Hunger has directly witnessed the impact of the conflict on the civilian population. The emergency needs are immense throughout the region, and the response must become smarter, quicker and more coherent to save lives at a scale that reflects the magnitude of the crisis.

In all countries, *“It is also time to address the structural needs of the region and vulnerability of the population, especially in food security and sustainable access to water and sanitation systems. It will allow to lay the foundations for a transition to recovery and development We need to promote projects that aim at empowering people through livelihood activities, income generating activities, etc”*. Furthermore, given the ongoing population movements, including between sites, and their urgent humanitarian needs, the humanitarian response must be ever evolving and flexible.

### ➤ Lack of coordination, including civil-military coordination

Despite some improvements in the past few months with the deployment of senior coordination staff, there is still a coordination challenge between actors in the Lake Chad Basin. The field staff in Nigeria for example underline that *“it is the overall challenge that they face to act more efficiently. Reinforcement of coordination is needed to foster better information sharing on needs and identify remaining gaps.”*

The dialogue between the military and humanitarians is also extremely challenging, although to be effective, it is crucial to maintain a dialogue between military and civilian actors. In Chad for example, *“the military forces are not enough dedicated to this dialogue, not sharing many information. They must be sensitized and send high-ranking military decision-makers to meetings to allow for more constructive discussions.”*

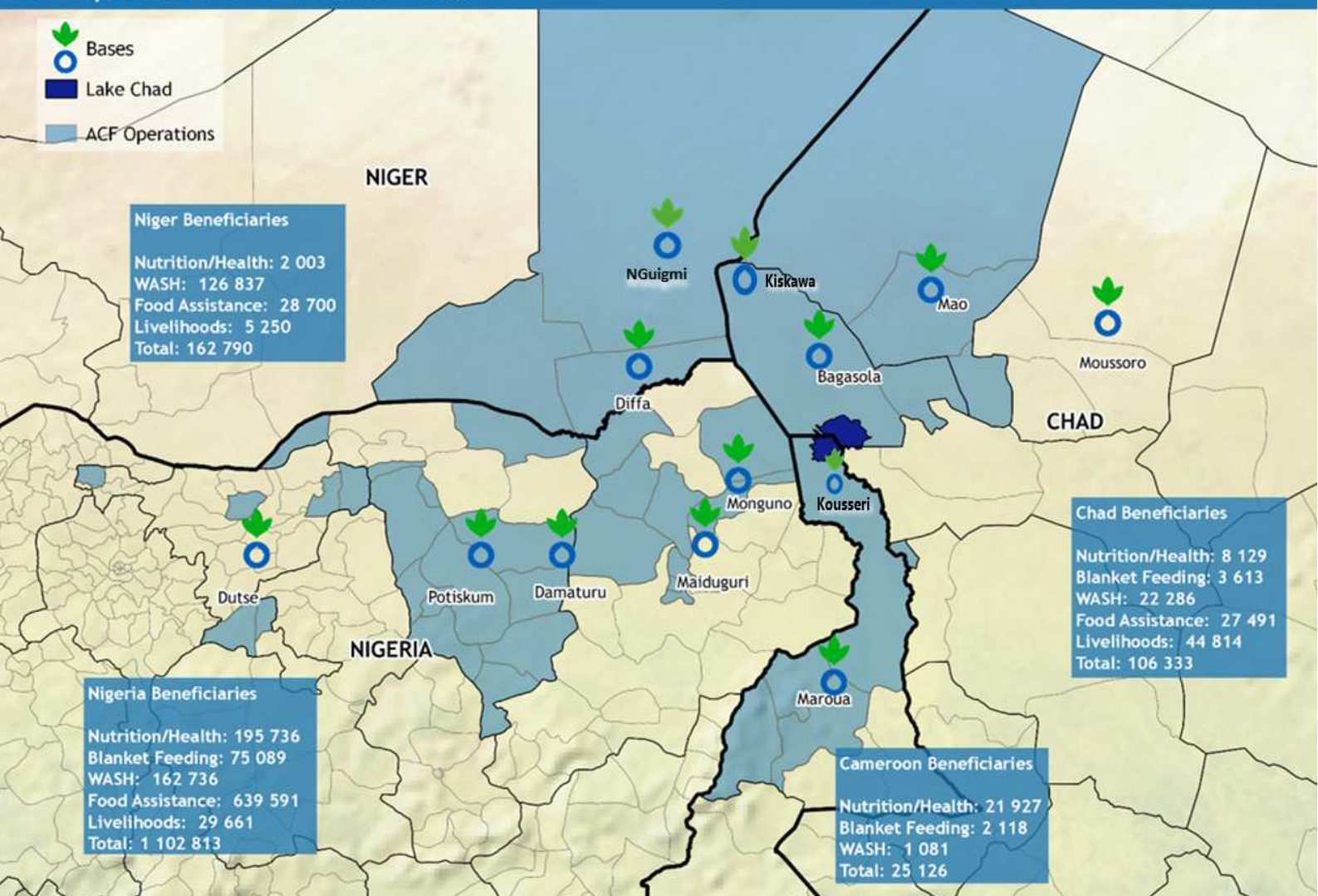
### ➤ Important funding gaps

The Lake Chad Basin crisis suffers from a critical underfunding situation, especially for countries surrounding Nigeria: as of September 2017, the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Nigeria is currently funded at 62%, but Cameroon and Chad remain funded at 32.7% and 30.4% funded respectively. In Niger, the response remains underfunded with only 34% of the required amount for the Diffa response received<sup>3</sup>.

Lack of financing is one of the main reasons, and there is an urgent need for additional and complementary mobilization of donors for humanitarian assistance. In Chad, the WASH and food security and nutrition are dramatically underfinanced. In Niger, where the July 2017 revision of the HRP estimates a 16% increase in needs, six months after the Oslo Conference, Diffa is only 30% funded in comparison to the pledges made. Pledges made during the Oslo Conference in February 2017 must be up-scaled and focused on the emergency response and mid-to-long term programmes targeting the root causes of the crisis where possible.

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<sup>3</sup> OCHA funding status, as of 28 August 2017



## About Action Against Hunger in the region

Action against Hunger is providing lifesaving assistance in the four countries affected by this crisis, working with displaced populations and host communities in Nigeria since 2010, in Niger since 1997, in Chad since 1982 and in Cameroon since 2014. Our field teams report desperate levels of human suffering. The critically high rates of child mortality, of acute undernutrition, along with the sheer number of people in dire need of aid, make this crisis one of the most severe that our emergency teams have encountered. The Action against Hunger network has thus mobilized its highest level response for this emergency.

In 2016, ACF teams have supported more than 4 million people across these four countries through programmes in Nutrition & health; Food security & livelihoods; Water, sanitation & hygiene; and mental health & care practices. From emergency to development, ACF is intervening through life saving activities and mid-term programmes supporting the resilience and autonomy of the population as well as the recovery and economic development of the region.

Independent, impartial, non-political and non-denominational, Action Against Hunger is a humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization fighting against hunger and under-nutrition.

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