

Beat: Health

NUMBER OF HUNGRY PEOPLE SPIKES IN ENTRAK SAHEL AS COVID-19 LOOMS

WORRYING IN BURKINA FASO & NIGER

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USPA NEWS - Across the Central Sahel -- a region that encompasses Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - the situation is extremely worrying, with the number of hungry rising steadily as the crisis deepens. The humanitarian crisis in the Central Sahel region of Africa is spiralling out of control - with more than 5 million people facing severe food insecurity across the region, according to a new joint food security assessment released today by food security partners including the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). The dramatic spike in the number of hungry people comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is spreading into fragile countries in a region home to the weakest health systems anywhere in the world.

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"This is a crisis layered on top of a crisis, and the situation risks getting out of hand," said Chris Nikoi, WFP's Regional Director for West Africa. "People are on the brink -- we must step up now to save lives -- we are the only hope for millions."

"Our message to the world is clear - look away now and the consequences will be no less than catastrophic," added Nikoi.

Across the Central Sahel -- a region that encompasses Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - the situation is extremely worrying, with the number of hungry rising steadily as the crisis deepens, also pushing 1.3 million people in Mali and 2 million people in Niger into severe food insecurity. The number of internally displaced people has also increased four-fold across the Central Sahel, with numbers spiking in Burkina Faso to 780,000 up from half a million at the start of the year. These communities have been forced from their homes by extremist violence and now rely almost entirely on external assistance to survive.

WFP's food and nutrition assistance provides a lifeline to millions in the region, as well as providing stability and strengthening the resilience of the communities in which they live. WFP assisted 1.5 million people in Burkina Faso and Mali in February, but more support is needed to tackle the crisis, especially as the threat of COVID-19 puts life-saving humanitarian work on the line. WFP urgently requires USD 208 million through August 2020 to carry out its lifesaving operations. WFP has extensive experience operating in the midst of a disease outbreak as it did during the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak, which showed that food assistance can play a vital role in containing disease spread on the one hand, while reducing vulnerabilities to infection through nutrition programmes that target vulnerable communities with compromised immune systems -- like the chronically ill and the elderly. WFP has rapidly adapted its operations to the COVID-19 pandemic, putting in place measures to reduce the risk of infection to beneficiaries, partners, and WFP staff. Source : World Food Programme (WFP).

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