

Humanitarian funding shortfalls: reflections on a visit to Chad



by Julia Newton-Howes

20 August 2012

According to UN figures, more than 18 million people are currently facing hunger across the countries of the Sahel region of West Africa. The international community has appealed for \$1.6 billion to respond but has so far received only around 50% of these funds.

Emergency funding for international crises last year experienced their biggest shortfall in a decade, according to the [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2012](#). In 2011, humanitarian agencies requested \$8.9 billion to assist people affected by emergencies globally but only received \$5.5 billion – a 38% shortfall.

In July, I travelled to Chad to visit CARE's humanitarian programs there, which are part of a broader response to the current drought and food crisis across the Sahel region.

I went to Eastern Chad, flying to Abeche thanks to the World Food Program. Abeche is a sprawling town, still showing the evidence of the fighting which occurred in Eastern Chad between 2005 and 2009, with razor wire around buildings and pock marks in walls.

The drive to the town of Biltine in Wadi Fira district, a distance of about 100 kms, took a long time, much of the journey was travelled off the badly pot-holed road. This is an area of pastoralists who also grow some sorghum and millet during the short rainy season. Last year the rains were very poor. Animals died due to the lack of pasture and most of the crops failed.

I visited a local feeding centre at the health clinic, run by Médecins Sans Frontières. The staff said that they had opened the centre because surveys had shown the presence of high levels of malnutrition. They explained that while they could stabilise the severely malnourished children who were brought in by their families, when the children went home there was often too little food for them and they cycled back into severe malnutrition.

CARE has been undertaking blanket distributions of food provided by the World Food Program in Wadi Fira and I visited one of the communities that had received support. The men spoke of how the food had helped to reduce their suffering but they needed more. Though the rain had just started, the harvest wouldn't come in until the end of September. The women brought baskets of food to show me what they were eating: wild fruits, tiny seeds and dried melon. One woman told me that at the height of the dry season it was a 15 km round trip to fetch water.

Chad is a poor, landlocked country in a difficult neighbourhood. Its history of coups and instability has left a legacy of extreme poverty which is being exacerbated by drought. In the 8 years from 2004 to 2011, Chad has been a major recipient of humanitarian aid, receiving total assistance of around \$1.72 billion.

It is a core principal of humanitarian aid that it be given with impartiality on the basis of need. It is, necessarily, short term and designed to save lives and alleviate suffering. Major acute emergencies such as the Haiti earthquake result in massive increases in humanitarian assistance. Yet year after year, billions of dollars are needed to assist people who are chronically vulnerable to drought and conflict, with very little assistance going to systematically address these vulnerabilities. This problem is well recognised, yet there seems to be no way within the current aid architecture to address it.

The Government of Ethiopia, with support from donors, has demonstrated how its social safety net program (PSNP) can be used effectively to combat chronic food insecurity. CARE is one of a number of NGOs which helps to deliver this program. The PSNP has ambitious aims: to enable households to build assets and increase income over 5 years to graduate out of chronic food insecurity. But in periods of increased stress, such as the 2011 drought, it provides a mechanism to quickly increase payments and reach out to more beneficiaries. It appears to have been much quicker and cheaper than traditional humanitarian actors ([Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2012](#)).

In the coming years, we may see the humanitarian system come under increasing strain. If shortfalls in humanitarian funding increase while the trend toward increasing numbers of people affected by disaster remains, the gap between what we need to do and what we can do will grow. It is time for the lessons of the PSNP, and other such initiatives for reducing vulnerability to predictable humanitarian emergencies, to be prioritised by aid agencies. Countries like Chad will always suffer from periodic drought, but they could avoid famine.

Julia Newton-Howes is the CEO of CARE Australia. Sunday 19 August was World Humanitarian Day, a time to honour all humanitarians and to remember those who

have lost their lives in the cause of duty.

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