

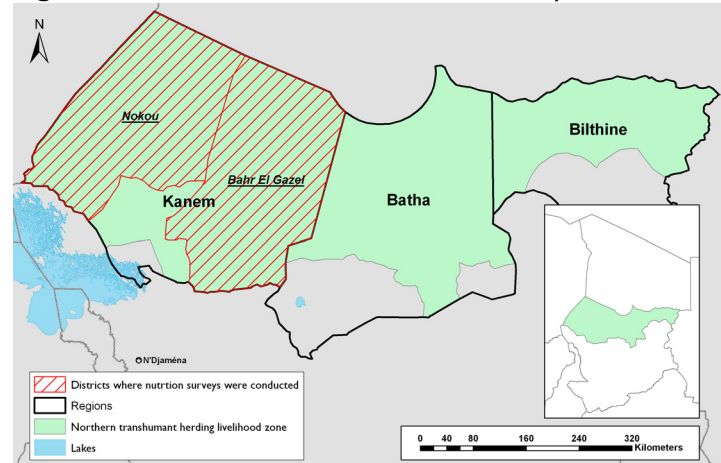
CHAD Food Security Alert

January 13, 2010

Elevated acute malnutrition and mortality in western pastoral areas

Levels of acute malnutrition are often chronically higher than emergency thresholds in the pastoral regions of Chad. In November/December 2009, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) conducted nutrition surveys in Noukou and Bahr el Gazel, departments in Chad's Kanem region (Figure 1). While the prevalence of acute malnutrition was above 15 percent in both areas, survey findings were particularly serious in Bahr el Gazel, where GAM prevalence was nearly double the WHO emergency threshold and mortality rates approached emergency levels. As food security in this area typically deteriorates between January and June, further increases in malnutrition and mortality are possible. Expanded screening of children and mothers, and emergency feeding programs are urgently needed in this area, in addition to longer-term initiatives to improve feeding and caring practices.

Figure 1. Location of recent ACF nutrition surveys



The survey in Bahr El Gazel was conducted between November 21 and December 3, 2009 and utilized the SMART methodology. Preliminary results indicate that the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), defined as weight-for-height z-score (WHZ) <-2 SD (NCHS), was 26.9 percent [95% CI: 23.4-30.4], while the prevalence of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), defined as WHZ <-3 SD (NCHS), was 4.5 percent [95% CI: 2.9-6.2]. These are significantly higher than relevant emergency thresholds. Rates of mortality were also high. Crude mortality was estimated at 0.94/10,000/day [95% CI: 0.67-2.50] and under-5 mortality was estimated at 1.59/10,000/day [95% CI: 0.53-1.34], compared to emergency thresholds of 1/10,000/day and 2/10,000/day respectively. These rates of acute malnutrition and mortality are even more concerning because households are typically better off during November/December, following crop harvests and given relatively good milk availability. The most recent national vulnerability assessment reported a GAM rate for the Kanem region of 23.8 percent, but this data was collected during April-June 2009, the area's peak hunger season.

Clear evidence of the drivers behind the elevated rates of malnutrition and mortality in Bahr el Gazel is limited. However, reported cases of diarrhea and acute respiratory infection among children during the two weeks preceding the survey were relatively low. While further information is needed, this suggests that, in addition to a series of chronic issues (e.g., low immunization and micronutrient supplementation rates, limited access to healthcare, poor feeding/caring practices, widespread maternal malnutrition), limited food access may be playing an important role. Household food security in the pastoral areas of Chad has been very poor this year, following two consecutive seasons of below-average rainfall, which have led to reduced pasture and water availability and poor crop harvests. These factors have contributed to declining animal body conditions, above-normal animal mortality, reduced animal births, poor milk availability, and unfavorable livestock-to-cereal terms of trade. Finally, the Bahr el Gazel's main market, Moussoro, is not being supplied normally by traders given the population's limited purchasing power. All of these factors constrain households' ability to meet basic food needs. Seasonal rains are not expected until June 2010, and therefore, food security is likely to erode further over the next six months, possibly driving rates of malnutrition and mortality even higher. More sedentary agro-pastoral households are most at risk because their lack of mobility constrains their ability to cope with food insecurity.

To address the current crisis in Bahr el Gazel, both screening and treatment of acute malnutrition should be immediately scaled-up. Additional investigation of the specific drivers of the crisis should also be conducted in order to better inform medium and longer-term response. Because the factors driving food insecurity in Kanem region are present throughout the Northern Transhumant Herding livelihood zone, nutrition surveys should also be conducted in Batha and Biltine regions.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.