**SAHEL emergency**

**Q&A for the DEA Team (April 2, 2012)**

1. **What is the situation for children in the Sahel region of Africa?**

The situation for children in the Sahel is extremely bad. Successive droughts, rising food prices and regional insecurity are pushing families into crisis. **One million children could die from severe acute malnutrition if we do not act now.**

We are in the “lean season” (or the time between crops) which is a dangerous time for many children and their families.

1. **Where is the Sahel? Which countries are affected?**

The Sahel is a region of West and Central Africa. **Fifteen million** **people** **need emergency assistance** across Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

1. **What is UNICEF doing to help?**

UNICEF is delivering urgently needed supplies to help save one million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. At therapeutic feeding centres, we are treating, diagnosing and preventing severe acute malnutrition.

We are also working with governments, international and local NGOs, and community partners to expand access to essential services. In addition to nutrition, we provide health, water and sanitation, education and child protection services for the most vulnerable children.

1. **What can Canadians do to support emergency efforts?**

**UNICEF is sounding the alarm for this silent emergency** and is calling upon Canadians to help save lives.

**It only costs $100 to save a child from severe acute malnutrition.** This donation provides a child with 60 days of essential nutrition and health supplies.

A donation of **$50** provides 1,200 high energy biscuits.

A donation of **$20** immunizes 65 children against measles.

A donation of **$10** provides a child with life-saving therapeutic food for a week.

Donations can be made at [**unicef.ca/sahelnow**](http://www.unicef.ca/sahelnow)

Supporters are also encouraged to use social media to spread the word. (Visit [unicef.ca/spreadtheword](http://www.unicef.ca/spreadtheword) to take action.)

1. **What is Canada doing to support emergency efforts?**

UNICEF Canada is grateful to the Canadian International Development Agency for providing $5 million to support UNICEF’s emergency nutrition programming in the region. However, more help is desperately needed. We are asking all Canadians, both individuals and the private sector, to help sound the alarm and raise the resources necessary to help save one million children at risk of dying.

1. **What has UNICEF done to prevent this crisis?**

UNICEF has always stressed early warnings and action on humanitarian disasters. Since signalling the crisis last December, we have worked to ensure that we have the right specialists, the right partners on the ground and the right supplies in place.

We have also worked aggressively to save lives. Last year, we treated 587,000 children for severe acute malnutrition.

However, there are critical funding gaps that limit our work. UNICEF is appealing for $60 million to save and protect the one million children at risk of dying from severe acute malnutrition.

1. **This type of crisis seems to happen regularly in the Sahel and yet nothing seems to change. Isn’t there a problem therefore with what aid agencies are doing?**

UNICEF is a leader in emergency response and preparedness. We work with partners (from governments to NGOs to communities) to reach the most vulnerable children, and to address the long term problem of malnutrition in the Sahel.

Working with governments, UNICEF has built up health systems, response mechanisms and community nutrition programs.

We are also addressing the structural causes of chronic malnutrition by increasing access to basic social services, improving social protection measures, supporting sustainable livelihoods, and encouraging positive behavioral change.

The Sahel is a fragile region with chronic vulnerability to drought, conflict and other external shocks. There will be setbacks and complications. However, we are committed to saving lives and strengthening the resiliency of communities and families.

1. **How has the coup in Mali (or conflict in the region) affected your work?**

Insecurity in the region has meant additional complications for our work. The conflict in Mali has displaced 200,000 people into neighbouring countries, increasing the demand for emergency assistance.

We have also had to factor security threats in Nigeria, Niger and Mauritania and migration from Libya and Cote d’Ivoire into our planning.

1. **How do you know that aid is reaching children and families in need?**

UNICEF has in place stringent monitoring and evaluation procedures for all our humanitarian programs. These include evaluation missions by program staff where possible, joint monitoring with local communities and partners, independent third party monitoring through private consultancies, and quarterly partner reports.

One cannot eliminate all risk, but you can mitigate it as much as possible in order to save lives in a very difficult environment.

1. **Are high birth rates a factor in this crisis?**

High birth rates are one of many factors to consider in the Sahel. Traditionally, populations with high child mortality rates have high birth rates. We encourage communities and governments to review all of the factors contributing to chronic malnutrition to improve social protection measures.

In this emergency, UNICEF’s priority is to ensure we have the means to save the lives of children and enhance the capacity of families to cope.

1. **Is this simply about food?**

Our main focus is children and their nutritional status. Unless children are getting the right types of food - not just any food - they can suffer lasting damage or lose their lives. This is why UNICEF is sounding the alarm for this emergency.

UNICEF provides an integrated package of therapeutic food, malaria prevention and treatment, immunization, diarrhea treatment and sanitation to save lives. Emergency education and child protection are also part of our response.

1. **Is this a famine?**

No, this is not a famine. A famine is a very precise term and certain criteria must be met for it to be applied. For example, in a famine, 30% of children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

The situation in the Sahel is extremely serious and we need the help of the global community to ensure that it does not escalate into a wide-spread emergency. We know the crisis is coming and there will be no excuses later for not acting now.