

# Alert

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## **MALI – No. 14/2010**

### **EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO DROUGHT AFFECTED FAMILIES IN NORTHERN MALI**

Geneva, 21st May 2010

In 2009, three regions of northern Mali - Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao - experienced low, sporadic rainfall barely reaching 90mm. This was half usual average of 180mm/year for these desert areas. Low rainfall has resulted in depletion of underground aquifers, excessive levels of salt in the few remaining wells, and a complete loss of grass and leaves on desert trees. The traditionally nomadic population in these regions usually follows routes defined by access to water and fodder. These traditional sources have largely failed and by the end of April 2010 the little financial reserves used by the pastoralists to purchase and transport fodder and water for their families and livestock had been exhausted. Hardy livestock like goats and camels were by November 2009 moved to areas usually reserved for the last six months of a normal dry season.

By April 2010 reports of animal deaths were common, closely followed by malnutrition in children and now increasingly in adults. Figures in April indicated 80 cases of malnutrition reported at one health centre in Gao. As most families are pastoralists living hundreds of kilometres from urban centres, these early figures are anticipated to be much higher by end of May.

Families have been forced to move to non-traditional areas in search of food and water, causing tension between different ethnic groups where the hosting community has little choice but to try and protect its limited reserves. Hundreds of herders have flooded to Gao from Burkina Faso and Niger, and on finding limited resources in Mali, are now too weak to return.

ICRC and OXFAM issued alerts in April to support over 100,000 people using the Government's Early Warning System (SAP) data that clearly identifies over 629,000 people suffering severe food insecurity in Gao and Kidal regions.

The Malian Government's Early Warning System estimated that 258,000 people in the main towns of Gao and Kidal were suffering from malnutrition in April. The Government

distributed 6970 metric tonnes of food to 3310 families in the worst locations of Gao and Kidal. The distribution centres are located in central regions due to logistical constraints. As such, families who have moved to look for fodder and water for their animals are not able to access the centres. These families at edge of the towns are the most vulnerable. Often, women and children are the ones left behind whilst the men go in search of water and fodder with the remaining animals.

In a rapid assessment, NCA staff in Gao estimate at least 4000 nomadic families are now camped on the edge of town with dying animals. The only survival mechanism is begging. People have also resorted to destructive coping mechanisms to feed their families.

Livestock prices have fallen to a quarter of their normal dry season value, meaning families cannot sell their remaining stock to buy essential food.

The situation is now critical with a need to distribute food, water and fodder to prevent major human death and a level of animal depletion from which it will take many years for families to recover.

ACT member NCA, working operationally and with partners, has developed a network of grass roots community emergency committees that have already identified the most vulnerable. NCA has systems in place to distribute food, water and fodder as soon as funds are available. This will be in coordination with OXFAM and ICRC in this region.

NCA is preparing an international appeal to respond and will target 5500 families (approximately 33,000 people) in the most inaccessible locations. The appeal will be shared with the ACT Alliance in the coming week.

Should the situation deteriorate, NCA has the capacity to extend its work through partners to reach more locations, in close co-ordination with the Government and NGOs.

**Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jessie Kgoroadira, ACT Chief Finance Officer ([jkg@actalliance.org](mailto:jkg@actalliance.org)).**

**Thank you for your attention.**

**For further information please contact:**

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