

US \$396 Million needed to avert catastrophic humanitarian crisis ...UN

The United Nations has said US\$396 million is urgently needed to salvage a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the nation's Northeast. The UN said that should something not urgently be done to address the situation; humanitarian partners would only reach about 300,000 of the 4.3 million at-risk people in need of food assistance in the troubled Northeast region of Nigeria during the lean season.

A statement by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) after the Launch of the Lean Season Food Security and Nutrition Crisis Multi-sector Plan 2023 said: "To prevent a widespread hunger and malnutrition crisis in north-east Nigeria from turning fully catastrophic US\$396 million is urgently needed to scale up humanitarian action in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states." The UN decried that: "More than half a million people may face emergency levels of food insecurity, with extremely high rates of acute malnutrition and cases of mortality if there is no rapid and significant scale up of humanitarian assistance. It estimated two million children under five in the three states are likely to face wasting this year, insisting that: "This is the most immediate and life-threatening form of malnutrition. Some 700,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition – meaning that they are 11 times more likely to die compared to well-nourished children. They need immediate action to survive."

The UN claimed that: "The deepening food crisis and worrying malnutrition levels are the result of years of protracted conflict and insecurity which continue to prevent more than two million people from returning home. A combination of fuel and food inflation, a naira cash crisis earlier in the year, and climate shocks (such as the record floods in Nigeria in 2022) are among factors that have worsened the crisis." The Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria, Mr. Matthias Schmale was quoted to have said: "I have seen firsthand the anguish of mothers fighting for the lives of their malnourished infants in our partner-run stabilization centres. This is a situation no one should have to face," adding that: "I have spoken with children who described going for days without eating enough. Mothers who said their children go to bed crying from hunger. Families struggling to feed their families as they have gone for months without receiving food assistance." He lamented that this may become the unfortunate reality for millions of food-insecure people in the BAY states unless resources and funding are urgently mobilized, adding that if additional funding is not received, humanitarian partners will only reach about 300,000 of the 4.3 million at-risk people in need of food assistance during the peak of the lean season. As more people in urgent need of food aid go unassisted, there will be an increased risk of starvation and death. With the current limited resources, nearly 3.4 million people will not be reached with agricultural livelihood support, including farming inputs such as fertilizers. This funding gap is critical for agricultural livelihoods sustaining over 80 per cent of the vulnerable people across the BAY states. A critical part of

addressing the food crisis is to enable people to grow their own food. The statement revealed that the World Food Programme (WFP) is scaling up its operations to assist 2.1 million people with emergency food and nutrition supplies, noting that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and nutrition partners aim to provide life-saving nutrition services to over one million malnourished children, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) planning to reach two million people with seed packages to secure cereal production for the upcoming harvest. "While we continue to work together to stave off catastrophe, the sheer scale of the food and nutrition crisis means that humanitarian assistance is critical right now," said the Country Representative and Country Director of WFP in Nigeria, Mr. David Stevenson, was quoted to have said.

The Country Representative of UNICEF in Nigeria, Ms. Cristian Munduate, called for concerted efforts to protect children. She said: "We have the power to make a difference in the lives of these children. With your support, we can prevent more children from suffering from malnutrition and give them a chance at a healthy and happy future." The FAO representative to Nigeria, Mr. Fred Kafeero, warned that the upcoming lean season may worsen food insecurity among vulnerable households without access to agricultural livelihood options. He said: "FAO requires funding to reach two million people with urgent food and livelihood assistance in the form of critical production inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and livelihood assets including small ruminants and poultry, and the corresponding skills to save lives, and protect and rebuild livelihoods." According to the statement, with the lean season coinciding with the rainy season, humanitarian partners are also concerned about outbreaks of diseases, such as acute watery diarrhoea, cholera and malaria, which will only aggravate the situation of malnourished children. Children suffering from malnutrition are at higher risk of dying from common infections.

The statement said the US\$396 million in funding will enable humanitarian organisations to swiftly expand food and nutrition assistance, along with supplementary interventions such as clean water and sanitation, healthcare, protection and logistics in the BAY states. And to kickstart the response to the food security and nutrition crisis in north-east Nigeria, the UN has released a combined \$18 million. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, has allocated \$9 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Humanitarian Coordinator Schmale will be disbursing a further \$9 million from the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF). "These CERF and NHF funds, however, account for less than five per cent of what humanitarian organizations require to address the most urgent food and nutrition needs. Significant additional and early funding is urgently needed," said Mr. Schmale. "As we have seen in previous years, early funding can help pull food insecure people back from the brink."