



humanitarian aid

WHO ARE WE ?

The European Union is the world's largest donor for humanitarian aid operations

Altogether, the European Commission in Brussels and the 27 EU Member State Governments contribute more than 50% of the overall humanitarian assistance that comes from official aid channels, with the Commission responsible for managing almost half of this. In 2008, the Commission provided €1 billion for humanitarian projects in more than 60 countries, funding relief to millions of victims of disasters outside the European Union.

For the European Commission, relief operations are coordinated by the Directorate General for Humanitarian aid (ECHO). Since 1992, the European Commission has funded relief in over 100 countries outside the European Union. Almost 100 humanitarian experts are based in crisis zones throughout the world.

Aid is available directly and channeled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation, through our operational partners. The partners include around 160 European Non-Government Organisations (NGO), United Nations agencies and the Red Cross 'family'

**SAHEL:
A WAKE-UP CALL
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
ACUTE MALNUTRITION**

RECENT PROGRESS

Without a long-term commitment and the allocation of sufficient resources from Governments and development partners, the most vulnerable populations in the countries of the Sahel will continue to pay a heavy price for the malnutrition that is hampering so badly their efforts towards sustained economic development.

To improve the link between emergency and development aid, and to promote long-term and sustainable effective action against malnutrition, ECHO works very closely with the European Commission services in charge of development programmes, more specifically within the framework of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), a major source of development assistance in the Sahel.

Following a major seminar in 2008 on enhancing the EC's contribution to the fight against malnutrition, a draft concept paper was prepared in January 2009 by the European Commission to help guide long term development programmes towards a better acknowledgment of malnutrition and its underlying causes. This initiative is opening the way for a durable link between emergency and development aid and the setting up of longer term strategies to put an end to the intolerable malnutrition of young children.

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Helping when
needed most



Humanitarian Aid

Nutrition



Humanitarian Aid

€76 MILLION SINCE 2005 TO SAVE MALNOURISHED CHILDREN IN THE SAHEL

UNICEF estimates that in the Sahel region of Western Africa alone, over 600,000 children under five years of age die every year as a result of malnutrition. To this silent «tsunami», should be added the tens of thousands of children that are damaged permanently by stunting caused by early childhood malnourishment and therefore unable to grow up as healthy, active and productive adults.

The Sahel is a belt that stretches across Africa from Cape Verde in the west to Sudan in the east. This region is amongst the poorest and least developed in the world. It experiences cycles of low rainfall with, in recent years, rains that have become increasingly irregular and poorly spread.

Following the nutritional crisis in Niger in 2005, the Sahel became a priority for the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission (ECHO). The persistent high prevalence of malnutrition for too many consecutive years, amongst children under five, justified the European Commission's commitment to a short to medium-term action plan to prepare the ground for long-term development aid programming to fight acute malnutrition in a sustainable way.

For the past 10 years, malnutrition rates in the Sahel have exceeded the international alert threshold of 10%. These, at times, have even exceeded 20% in some areas. Malnutrition is responsible for 60% of young children's deaths, contributing to child mortality rates in the Sahel being amongst the highest in the world. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals of reducing hunger and infant and maternal mortality rates in the countries of the Sahel is therefore a major challenge.

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department has been funding projects in the Sahel region since 2005 aimed at reducing malnutrition rates. In Niger in 2005, more than 15% of children under-five years of age were malnourished. By 2007, this rate had been brought back to 10%, largely thanks to the sustained and dedicated humanitarian effort deployed by the European Commission's partners (United Nations, Red Cross and Non-Government Organisations (NGO)). However, despite these encouraging figures the high endemic prevalence of malnutrition registered in some areas, depending on the season, and the persistence of the deep rooted causes remains of constant concern.



OBJECTIVE: SAVING THE LIVES OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The goal of the European Commission's Humanitarian department (ECHO) in the Sahel region is to continue to contribute to the reduction of acute malnutrition and mortality among the most vulnerable segments of the population, especially young children and pregnant and lactating women.

The countries targeted in this sustained humanitarian response in 2009 are the ones that have the highest malnutrition rates; often well above the critical 10% of children under-five. These are: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Togo, which also received ECHO assistance in the past to tackle malnutrition in the north, is now registering malnutrition rates below the alert thresholds, proving again that a national integrated strategy makes it possible to achieve a sustainable improvement in children's nutritional status.

ECHO has also responded, in compliance with its humanitarian mandate, to short-term malnutrition peaks registered in northern Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea. In 2008, funding was provided to set up national integrated therapeutic care programmes.

THE STRATEGY

The European Commission's strategy to fight malnutrition in the Sahel is based on three pillars:

- 1) Improving the knowledge base of malnutrition through better understanding of early warning indicators, including household economy studies and the funding of regular nutritional surveys.
- 2) Support to innovative and replicable pilot projects to provide nutritional care to severely malnourished children and lactating mothers with ready to use therapeutic foods and to improve their access to basic health care. Support for the early treatment of malnutrition before it becomes severe. Measures to strengthen the coping mechanisms of the most vulnerable.
- 3) Advocacy and public awareness building of public opinion, local Governments and development partners that will contribute to making nutrition central to the development agenda.

THE FACTS

- 1.3 million children under-five suffer from acute malnutrition in the Sahel.
- Infant mortality in the Sahel ranks amongst the highest in the world.
- Malnutrition is responsible for 60% of deaths amongst under-five year old children.
- Balanced nutrition is crucial in the first two years of life. When not available, irreversible damage starts to set in past that age.
- The majority of malnourished children not only suffer from lack of access to food but also from the widespread extreme poverty in the Sahel.
- This extreme poverty of a large section of the Sahel's population restricts their access to basic services (health, clean water and sanitation) and quality food in sufficient quantities and explains in part the high prevalence of malnutrition among young children.
- Aggravating factors exist : diseases and poor quality of water represent a critical risk for malnourished children.
- It is estimated that malnutrition costs more than 3% of the gross national product (GNP) of affected countries every year, further burdening their fragile development.
- Since 2005, the European Commission has funded €76 million worth of projects related to nutrition, health, water and sanitation in the Sahel region.

ECHO Nutrition funding between 2005 and 2009 in € millions

BURKINA FASO	CHAD	MALI	MAURITANIA
16.6	0.55	8.2	3.3
NIGER	TOGO	GUINEE CKR	COTE D'IVOIRE
43.2	1.15	1.3	0.8
TOTAL			
76			

Since 2005, these funds have helped ensure the treatment of hundreds of thousands of young children suffering from acute malnutrition and to improve access to basic health services for the most vulnerable and poorest populations. Local humanitarian agencies and communities were also empowered to be better prepared to deal with future external shocks.

The European Commission has also supported activities to raise public awareness of malnutrition issues, as well to encourage local Governments to place the fight against malnutrition in a priority in all development strategies. Without this collective awakening to malnutrition's harsh reality, the hopes of these countries to implement sustainable economic growth and development will not be achieved.

