

North east Nigeria: Diverting focus away from regional humanitarian crisis risks destabilizing gains made during 2017

Six months on from the ‘Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region’, the massive humanitarian needs in northeast Nigeria continue to grow as the conditions of civilians displaced by the violent eight-year conflict deteriorate further during the annual rainy season. The conflict between armed opposition groups and Nigerian and regional security forces has resulted in 8.5 million people in urgent need of life-saving assistance in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, the three most affected states in north east Nigeria.¹ More than 5.2 million people in northeast Nigeria remain food insecure, with 450,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).²

At the ‘Oslo Conference’, on 24 February, **14 donors pledged \$672 million for Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria for 2017**. There was an agreement to further scale up the response, especially food assistance, to reach the most vulnerable groups threatened by famine, including children with SAM. The centrality of protection was emphasized with special attention given to the needs of women, children and youth, particularly ensuring the voluntariness of return in safety and dignity. Participants agreed that accelerated education, safe schools and expanded services must be prioritized and also highlighted the need for longer- term support and durable solutions for the displaced populations.³

Ahead of the ‘Oslo Consultative Group on Prevention and Stabilization in the Lake Chad Region’ where senior officials are meeting on 6th September 2017, **we, the undersigned NGOs delivering humanitarian assistance in Northeast Nigeria, join together in asking stakeholders from the ‘Oslo Conference’ to follow-up on the full range of commitments made during the conference, and consider the worsening humanitarian situation in addition to stabilization discussions**. While recognizing that stabilization efforts are urgently needed in order to address root causes of insecurity that led to the current humanitarian crisis, and welcoming the dialogue taking place in Berlin between 4-6 September 2017, we are concerned that necessary follow-up discussions on humanitarian needs and funding requirements in the region are not part of the official agenda for the dialogue, with no further follow-up meeting planned among stakeholders to address

¹ Humanitarian Response Plan, January-December 2017, Available at: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_nga_hrp_2017_19122016.pdf

² Lake Chad Snapshot 07 July 2017. Available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lake%20Chad%20Snapshot_07%20July%202017.pdf

³ Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and Lake Chad Region Outcome Statement. Available at: <http://oslohumanitarianconference2017.org/outcomestatement.cfm>

humanitarian issues. In light of the urgency of addressing the humanitarian situation, we are concerned that pivoting from a combined humanitarian, political and security focus to an exclusive focus on security and stabilization does not reflect the situation on the ground. It could undermine gains made at the ‘Oslo conference’ if stakeholders do not review progress of the implementation of their commitments. **Stabilization should be seen as an avenue to provide assistance to complement the humanitarian assistance and the two efforts should be rolled out in a complementary way and not in isolation.**

Progress since ‘Oslo Conference’

14 donors pledged \$672 million for Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria for 2017 and beyond. Of the total amount, \$458 million was for 2017. Six months later, donors have committed or disbursed \$384 million or 84% of the total 2017 pledges. As of 23 August 2017, the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Nigeria has received US\$481.5 million, representing 45.7 per cent of the total US\$1.05 billion appeal. The HRP currently has a funding gap of \$572.9 million with Displacement Managements System (0%), Response and Recovery (0.1%), Emergency Shelter & NFI (6.8%) and Education (11.8%) being the four least funded sectors.⁴ This lack of funding continues to impact the ability to deliver timely, life-saving and dignified assistance to people in need.

Prior to the ‘Oslo Conference’, 22 NGOs suggested 7 steps to save more lives and assist people in Nigeria and Lake Chad Basin, (1) putting protection of civilians at the centre of the response, (2) a scale-up in the food and nutrition response, (3) increasing access to more, better and safe quality education, (4) safeguarding humanitarian space, (5) strengthening leadership of the response and improving humanitarian coordination, (6) ensuring all returns are safe, voluntary and dignified and (7) building resilience and increasing local capacity.⁵ This paper assesses progress against them in north east Nigeria six months after the conference.

The seven steps remain even more relevant today with the crisis far from being resolved and both internal and external factors limiting the response. Within the past 6 months, NGOs have scaled up their efforts, continue to be the ones on the frontline and are leading advocacy on pertinent issues in collaboration with other actors to ensure the crisis is still getting much needed political and financial attention. Protection concerns are on the rise with influxes of

⁴ OCHA Funding Overview, 23 August 2017. Available at:

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/23082017_ocha_nga_humanitarian_funding_overview.pdf

⁵ Seven Steps to saving lives and assisting people in Nigeria and Lake Chad Basin. Available at:

<http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/seven-steps-saving-lives-and-assisting-people-nigeria-and-lake-chad-basin>

Nigerians coming back from Cameroon putting impoverished host communities under extreme pressure and overstraining humanitarian services, congesting camps and settlements and straining limited food and water resources. The rainy season has disabled access in an environment where infrastructure and services are already missing and has led to an outbreak of diseases, such as cholera and Hepatitis E.

Step 1: Put Protection of Civilians at the Centre of Response

Women, girls, men and boys continue to be subjected to ongoing human rights abuses including sexual violence, abductions, killings, torture, forced recruitment, forced disappearance and arbitrary detention. The prolonged absence of food security and access to livelihoods is exacerbating serious protection risks including domestic violence, forced marriages, unwanted pregnancies and sexual exploitation⁶. 61% of households, particularly people coming back from Cameroon, have adopted negative emergency coping strategies such as begging.⁷ Limited access to reporting mechanisms and redress enables a climate of impunity for perpetrators with 314 cases of gender based violence (GBV) reported from one NGO between March and July 2017. In July 2017, a significant spike in security incidents was recorded: about a dozen villages across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe were attacked by armed opposition groups, posing grave protection concerns. 142 attacks with 59 of those within IDP camps, were recorded between April and June in north east Nigeria.⁸ There is an increasing number of children being used by the militants to carry out bomb attacks with 83 children recorded being used since January 2017.⁹ Community based referral pathways are still not functional and access to reach the most affected populations with protection services remains hindered by the volatile security situation. Although, the situation remains bleak and the sector remains at 18.4% funded¹⁰, to date in Nigeria, protection partners have reached more than 1.3 million people in need, including 266,000 Nigerians who have come back from neighboring countries. Activities have included psychosocial support for more than 160,000 children and reintegration support for nearly 1,500 children and over 900 women previously associated with armed groups.¹¹

⁶ ACAPS thematic report, "Nigeria: returning refugees in Borno state", 31 July 2017 Available at: <https://www.acaps.org/country/nigeria/special-reports>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ International NGO Safety Organisation Nigeria Q2 Report 2017

⁹ Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/use-children-human-bombs-rising-north-east-nigeria>

¹⁰ OCHA Funding Overview, 23 August 2017. Available at:

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/23082017_ocha_nga_humanitarian_funding_overview.pdf

¹¹ HCT Key Messages- Mid August –Mid September 2017

We call for all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law (IHL) and to ensure that humanitarian actors, without any restrictions, are able to reach the most affected populations with food, water, health and life-saving services.

We specifically recommend:

- Further funding to invest in the development of **specific livelihood and prevention strategies**, including the engagement of men and boys;
- Strengthening of **community based protection mechanisms**, including the training of more women and men action groups;
- Developing and implementing **functional referral pathways**, the establishment of reporting and accountability mechanisms, including much needed anonymous hotlines.

Step 2: Scale-up the Food and Nutrition Response in Nigeria and the Region

Food insecurity and malnutrition remain at a critical level with 5.2 million people food insecure in the three most affected states in north east Nigeria and populations in many areas dependent on aid. 50,000 people are already living in famine-like conditions. However, the sector remains underfunded with only 29% as of August 2017.¹² Food remains a major priority as all LGAs receiving people coming back face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food security levels and 65% of the population in Bama and Ngala are food insecure.¹³ The rainy season in the last few months has limited access to affected populations, thus hindering the delivery of food assistance. Continued attacks impact the functioning of the market with the volatile security situation limiting access to livelihood activities, firewood, and water further exacerbating food insecurity. There are 1.2 million malnourished children under 5 (SAM and MAM) and pregnant and lactating women in need of assistance in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe.¹⁴ The coverage of nutrition treatment services and supplementation services remained lower compared to the actual needs in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa with only 38.5% health facilities (288/749 assessed facilities).¹⁵ There has been some progress in the last six months with a massive scale up in food assistance with a shift from status based to needs based targeting. 2.1 million people were reached with life-saving assistance, through in kind or cash based

¹² OCHA Funding Overview, 23 August 2017. Available at:

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/23082017_ocha_nga_humanitarian_funding_overview.pdf

¹³ ACAPS thematic report, "Nigeria: returning refugees in Borno state", 31 July 2017 Available at:

<https://www.acaps.org/country/nigeria/special-reports>

¹⁴ Available at: <http://fscluster.org/nigeria/document/nigeria-humanitarian-dashboard-january-o>

¹⁵ [Health Sector Dashboard Jan-June 2017](http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-humanitarian-dashboard-january-june-2017). Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-humanitarian-dashboard-january-june-2017>

support in July 2017.¹⁶ To date this year, nutrition partners have reached nearly 500,000 children and pregnant/lactating women through supplementary feeding programmes and over 210,000 infants and young children with nutritional support. In addition, more than 100,000 children under five have been treated for severe acute malnutrition (SAM).¹⁷

We call for greater coordination and communication between all actors, including with the government of Nigeria, in order to continue providing food assistance and nutrition treatment services to affected populations.

We specifically recommend:

- Finalizing and rolling out **clear contingency plans** and ensuring food and other relief items are pre-positioned;
- Developing and implementing a **coordinated multi-sector approach** which includes prioritizing capacity building of health workers, strengthening health facilities and rolling out community education, including infant and young child feeding (IYCF) and the causes and effects of malnutrition.

Step 3: Increase Access to More, Better and Safe Quality Education

Schools, teachers and students have been deliberately targeted in this conflict. Despite the education sector being a key priority for discussion at Oslo, the sector continues to be heavily underfunded with 11.8% of the required funding being received as of August 2017. With the increase in security incidents including attacks in villages and IDP camps within the last six months coupled with the continued displacement, 2.9 million children continue to miss out on an education, either formal or informal, resulting in a lost generation.¹⁸ Millions of children denied basic education and opportunities will have a long-term impact for the development of the north east and the prospects of peace and security in the region. Education must be prioritized within the response and needs to be seen as a priority entry point for long term resolution of the conflict and peace building. As of July 2017, 32,000 children have been identified as unaccompanied/separated.¹⁹ 15% of households report having children hawking or begging²⁰, and access to services, both educational and

¹⁶OCHA Sit Rep July 2017. Available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/25082017_nga_ocha_ne_humanitarian_situation_update_july_2017.pdf

¹⁷HCT Key messaging mid-August- mid September 2017

¹⁸OCHA Sit Rep July 2017. Available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/25082017_nga_ocha_ne_humanitarian_situation_update_july_2017.pdf

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰ UNHCR Supplementary Appeal, January-December 2017 Available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Revised%202017%20SB%20Nigeria%20Situation_FINAL.pdf

psychosocial are still inadequate, with only 23% of children in need being reached. A key population that has been neglected within this response are the adolescents. A recent report highlights the increase in drug abuse among male adolescents as a result of psychosocial distress.²¹ Due to the security situation and other factors, teachers are hesitant to be deployed to work, even in government schools that have been rehabilitated.

We call for the immediate cessation of attacks against educational facilities, personnel, and students as well as a stop to the military use of such infrastructures in line with the Safe School Declaration.²²

We continue to call on all actors, including governments, to recognize education as key to the response and to channel more funding to the Education Sector.

We specifically recommend:

- **Funding** should be made available for the following areas; (1) systems strengthening; (2) reconstruction of school buildings; (3) payment and training of teachers; (4) strengthening of community participation that encourages engaging in education as a common goal;
- Exploring **alternative solutions** to formal education including resources to be made available for mobile schools;
- Tackling **negative perceptions** of formal education through more community sensitization and campaigns;
- Prioritizing **life skills and vocational training programmes** for affected adolescents.

Step 4: Safeguard Humanitarian Space: Safe Movement to Reach more People in Need

In Nigeria, humanitarians are still restricted from reaching areas that are outside the control of the military restraining their actions to LGA's headquarters. An estimated 700,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance are currently living in inaccessible areas. We applaud the efforts of UNHAS who in the last six months have massively scaled up, now flying to 10 locations, the majority inaccessible by road. Further, the establishment of 3 humanitarian hubs in Maiduguri, Gwoza and Bama with a fourth in development for Ngala has increased

²¹ Plan report- "A Child Protection and Education Needs Assessment in Selected Communities of Borno and Adamawa State", PLAN International, August 2017

²² The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that express political support for the protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict. As of July 2017, 68 countries have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, including Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

the ability of humanitarian actors to be able to access populations for a longer time period in insecure zones. Civil-military coordination mechanisms have been strengthened but alternatives for allowing humanitarians to move within insecure areas are still urgently needed. We welcome recent efforts including; the renewed work to make the rapid response mechanism (RRM) operational, the reconstitution of the Access Working Group and establishment of a newly established CMCoord Working Group. Gaps in coordination and capacity still need to be urgently addressed in order to increase access and be able to provide critical quick impact, lifesaving, and multi-sectorial response to highly vulnerable persons. There has been no improvement within the operational environment with bureaucratic obstacles, such as such as difficulties with registration and unclear processes for visas and customs clearance, including pharmaceuticals, causing gaps in the delivery of life saving services.

We appreciate the ongoing support of the government of Nigeria, but we continue to call for unhindered humanitarian access to communities, particularly in insecure areas. Further, we request the government of Nigeria to support NGOs navigating through bureaucratic obstacles by developing clear procedures and appointing a senior focal point as this is still causing major humanitarian operational constraints.

We specifically recommend:

- Continuing the funding for **UNHAS** as a crucial life-saving service;
- Investing more resources to **facilitate access negotiations** and independent assessments;
- Expedited implementation of the **newly developed action plan for civil military engagement**;
- Drafting and finalizing **Civil-military coordination guidelines** in accordance with the international UN Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets to Support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies without further delay.

Step 5: Strengthen Leadership of the Response and Improve Humanitarian Coordination

In the past six months, we commend the efforts to strengthen leadership of the coordination mechanisms at all levels. However, there is still a need to continue to improve coordination and communication. While welcoming the newly established Local Government Coordination, there is still a massive gap in data collection, specifically in information sharing

and data sharing from humanitarian operational centres to the Maiduguri and Abuja coordination bodies that needs to be addressed. Although the shift of the response moving to Maiduguri has enabled quicker, more effective decision making, there is still an evident disconnect between addressing the needs on the field and addressing them from a Maiduguri and/or Abuja level. Evidence based data must inform those making decisions and designing interventions, especially for the multi-year Humanitarian Response Plan and Humanitarian Needs Overview that are currently being developed. Although NGOs are co-leads on the majority of the Working Groups, the general consensus is that their voices are not being represented equally and there is limited space to engage within the government led coordination platforms.

We call upon the government of Nigeria to continue to support the response and we stress the need for greater collaboration between all actors, from the field to Maiduguri and Abuja level in data and information sharing, to ensure the design and implementation of the response is needs based and accountable to affected people.

We specifically recommend:

- Further funding to strengthen the **collection and sharing of data** between those in the field and those sitting in Maiduguri/Abuja including increasing the number of information managers and better identifying needs and gaps;
- Greater **clarification on roles and responsibilities** of Sectors and Clusters to improve prioritization, orient operational partners and adapt responses to ensure all actors are contributing to designing a needs based response that is accountable to affected people;
- Developing a **clear resource mobilization plan** between humanitarian and development actors.

Step 6: Ensure All Returns are Safe, Voluntary and Dignified

Despite the signing of a Tripartite Agreement on 2 March 2017 between UNHCR and the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon, on the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon, cases of refoulement continue to be reported. An estimated 35,000 Nigerian refugees have been organized to come back from Cameroon to Nigeria between January and June 2017 with many more organizing themselves. Around 8,000 of them have reported coercion and force by the Cameroonian government²³, clearly highlighting that post

²³ ACAPS thematic report, "Nigeria: returning refugees in Borno state", 31 July 2017 Available at: <https://www.acaps.org/country/nigeria/special-reports>

Oslo conference, the situation has deteriorated. Not only are more refugees coming back but more of them are reporting coercion and that they were forced to come back. Further, of the 360,000 returnees registered by the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) as of 30 June, 17,000 report being maltreated, harassed or assaulted physically.²⁴ As long as we cannot confirm that movements are voluntary, informed and dignified the use of the word ‘returns’ is still not accurate, with the need for all actors to understand that these “returns” are actually secondary displacements, as people move to towns closer to home but are unable to return to their villages of origin. All actors must acknowledge that such movement does not in fact constitute the definition of “return” as a recognized durable solution. It remains that the majority of those coming back do not have access to clear and accurate information about the situation in their areas of habitual residence. Currently, humanitarian partners in Nigeria are preparing contingency plans for the possible return of around 75,000 Nigerian refugees.

While we applaud UNHCR, the Governments of Nigeria and Cameroon for the strides made towards the implementation of the Tripartite agreement by the establishment of the Commission, their first meeting on 10 August 2017 and the plans underway to develop the plan of Action, we urgently call for the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement. Further, we call on all governments in the region to make sure that all persons re-entering Nigeria is treated with dignity, has access to information and is given access to basic human services, especially within the first 72 hours

We specifically recommend:

- Strengthening **clear coordination channels** between the governments and the humanitarian community to provide information about the number of people registered to return, areas of origin and areas of putative return to ensure that authorities and humanitarian agencies can provide sufficient services;
- Ensuring **contingency plans are funded** and ready for rapid mobilization;
- Prioritizing the roll out of **information campaigns** highlighting the reality of the situation of the camps to ensure all decisions to move are fully informed

Step 7: Build Resilience and Increase Local Capacity

Building resilience and addressing long term solutions whilst not diverting funds from the humanitarian response is of crucial importance. Current conversations, post Oslo Conference, for the region are focused on addressing the structural causes of the conflict. Humanitarian assistance should be complemented with a scale up of conflict management

²⁴ Ibid

and crisis prevention as well as stabilization activities. This should never translate into a decrease in humanitarian efforts. Both should work in parallel and actors must coordinate themselves. The Lake Chad Basin crisis cannot be treated as homogenous. All affected countries and areas within countries are at different security, humanitarian and development stages with some areas in North East Nigeria still inaccessible and other areas in Yobe and Adamawa already moving into recovery and stabilization activities.

While we commend all actors, especially the government of Nigeria, on their future planning for medium and long term peace building processes, including through enhancing regional cooperation, fostering local and intra-regional dialogue and increasing the legitimacy of state institutions, we re-emphasize the need to ensure stabilization measures do not compromise the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance. While welcoming the development and implementation of a multi-year response plan, we call on donors and governments to allocate both short term and longer term predictable funding.

We specifically recommend:

- Prioritizing building of **strategic relationships with local organizations**, civil society and stakeholders to continue to work together to restore peoples' dignity, lives and livelihoods while working towards sustainability, local ownership and durable solutions.
- Including the affected people in areas as **agents of their own change** and involving them in planning a resilience-building, conflict sensitive approach so they can build on their existing methods for tackling the risks they face.

This statement is endorsed by the following NGOs:

