The West Africa Food Crisis

The Challenge

Irregular rains in 2009 have led to a severe lack of pasture, water and a poor harvest across West Africa. The worst affected country is Niger, where the harvest has declined by 30% compared with the previous year, and 7.1 million people have been placed in acute food need. This is nearly 50% of Niger’s population.

The Human Impact

People in Niger live in a harsh climate at the best of times and are skilled at adapting to the challenges they face. Many are cattle herders, moving from place to place in search of fresh pasture and water, and using their cows as a store of money value. However the poor rains have led cattle herders to move to areas without water or fresh pasture. They literally have nowhere else to go.

The situation is made worse by rising grain prices, making it too expensive for the poorest people to buy food.

People are eating fewer meals, one every day or even one every two days. Old people and children are dying of hunger-related diseases and people can be seen resorting to emergency coping strategies, such as searching for wild grains in ant hills.

Extreme weather events and irregular growing seasons are likely to become more frequent around the world as global temperatures rise. Poor people require support as they adapt to this changing environment.
Lack of Money to Tackle Poverty

The Challenge

10 million people die every year from hunger related diseases. 1 billion people still live in extreme poverty. Progress is being made but more money is needed.

On top of this the UN estimates an additional $500 billion is required every year to help developing countries adapt to the impact of climate change.

In the meantime governments are cutting back on both domestic budgets and aid commitments.

The Human Impact

Things can and do improve - the number of people living on less than $1 per day declined from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion between 1990 and 2005. There are 33 million more children attending school, thanks to aid and debt relief.

However, if governments had provided the money for development aid that they promised in 1970, extreme poverty could now have been ended 22 times over by now! It is predicted that aid promises will be missed by a further $30bn, at a potential cost of 5 million lives.

The cost of sitting back and not adapting to climate change could leave an extra 600 million people malnourished by 2080.

But in tough economic times where will the money needed come from?
Hunger in Cambodia

The Challenge

Rising food prices are dragging 105 million people into poverty. People in developing countries spent an extra £324 billion on 2009 just to buy enough food to feed themselves. The world’s poor spend up to 80% of their incomes on food, so price increases hit them hard and set back progress on tackling global poverty. This is happening across the world. Cambodia is one example.

The Human Impact

In 2006 a day’s pay in Cambodia was enough to feed a family of 6 with a little cash left over. In 2008 it was barely enough to feed half the family. The result is that adults are going hungry so children can eat, and villagers are forced to send their children out to work.

But why are food prices rising?

Climate change means that farmers’ harvests are suffering and that they produce less food to sell in the shops. Result? The price of food goes up.

With global oil prices rising, farmers have to pay more for petrol to run farm machinery and transport food to the shops. Result? The price of food goes up.

On top of all of this, the world is eating more meat. Cattle eat the grain which could be used to feed the poor, and less grain is for sale. Result? The price of food goes up.
Typhoons in the Philippines

The Challenge

Successive typhoons hit the Philippines in September and October 2009 resulting in devastating floods. One of the biggest was Typhoon Ketsana that hit the capital city Manila and dumped a month’s worth of rainfall in one day. This resulted in widespread floods, washing away homes and stranding people on rooftops. Hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands lost their homes and livelihoods. The typhoons affected 10 million people.

The Human Impact

Lives were put at risk by inadequate water supplies and poor sanitation. Flooding also dramatically increased public health risks. In the first two weeks following Ketsana, 89 deaths were recorded from leptospirosis alone.

Many wells that communities relied upon were submerged for weeks, and when the floodwaters receded the wells were contaminated.

Many families had lost their means of livelihood and needed support to start making money again.

Women and children were particularly vulnerable to violence. This was made worse by the lack of sanitation facilities and privacy. Many pregnant and new mothers were not being given the healthcare they needed.
Flooding affecting farmers in Bolivia

The Challenge

Sustainable farming in the Amazonian communities of Bolivia is a challenge. Alternating seasons of floods and drought force farmers to resort to ‘slash and burn’ agriculture and this further damages the fragile ecosystem. Recent floods have been particularly severe.

The relationship between climate change, local weather patterns and the weather shocks being experienced with increasing severity in the Bolivian Amazon are not yet fully understood. However there is evidence that climate change is making weather shocks more frequent and intense.

The Human Impact

The ability of local people in the area to grow food is being severely restricted by annual cycles of floods, droughts and poor soil conditions. During the rainy season large areas of land are flooded for several months and crops are lost. When water drains into the Amazon River, it takes nutrients and seeds with it. Soil becomes infertile so it's difficult to grow new crops.

Floods in 2008 damaged and destroyed homes. Livelihoods were left in ruins. Many people were forced from their homes for several months and relied on the local government to provide food. The population of Bolivia is poor with high levels of inequality, placing many of the poorest people at risk from the impact of climate change.
Lack of help from the Government during floods - Philippines

The challenge

In September and October 2009 two major typhoons hit the Philippines resulting in devastating floods and killing a total of 849 people. With almost 10 million people affected, the government needed to act fast.

However, there was no clear direction from national government on how to proceed and a lack of clarity on who was responsible for what. In some areas floodwater persisted for up to 6 months. The government had not provided basic facilities for towns with high populations for a long time, meaning that they were already at high risk before the typhoons even struck. Oxfam wanted better planning for the areas where many people live to stop the same problems happening again.

The Human Impact

Lack of government preparedness and response meant that people were placed at even greater risk. As time went on, even more people were being made homeless. Instead of providing more shelter for people, the government were destroying settlements and trying to close evacuation centres early. Lack of toilet facilities meant there were concerns about people’s health. Safety, especially for women, was also a problem, as many had no privacy at all. The government was doing little to help the people most in need.