

28th June 2010, Niger - Nearly 17 percent of Niger's children younger than five suffer acute malnutrition, a 42 percent increase over the same period last year, according to a national survey released by the government. More than 15 percent acute malnutrition is classified as a critical emergency by the UN World Health Organization (WHO). The report links this increase to the poor 2008-2009 harvests.

The government, with UN agency and NGO support, surveyed 8,000 under-fives nationwide from late-May to mid-June. In Agadez region, only urban centres were surveyed due to insecurity.

Without immediate intervention, the situation is likely to further deteriorate before the September harvests, according to the government. Below are some of the report's most important findings:

- **Nationwide acute malnutrition:** Nearly half a million children are acutely malnourished, including some 87,000 severely malnourished. The most affected regions are Diffa, Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua, where acute malnutrition falls into WHO's critical threshold. Acute severe malnutrition has increased to 3.2 percent from 2.1 percent a year ago. According to WHO, the median fatality rate for severe acute malnutrition ranges from 30 to 50 percent, but can be reduced substantially when properly treated.
- **Age and gender:** Throughout the country, with the exception of Diffa region, children younger than three are twice as affected by acute malnutrition than older children (21.7 percent compared with 9.5 percent). More boys than girls are malnourished.
- **Mortality:** The rate is higher than one death per 10,000 children a day but remains below the humanitarian community's emergency threshold of two deaths per 10,000 children a day, except in Zinder region. The relatively low death rate may not reflect the gravity of the nutritional crisis due to the ongoing depletion of food stocks.
- **Chronic under-nutrition:** Similar to 2009, nearly half of Niger's children are chronically undernourished and lacking life-sustaining nutrients. In Zinder region, six children in 10 do not eat enough on a daily basis to maintain natural physical activity. In Niamey, 17 percent of children suffer from under-nutrition. A fifth of the surveyed children nationwide are severely chronically undernourished.