

Press release

22 January 2012

Mitchell announces emergency aid in response to looming food crisis in the Sahel and urges others to step up efforts

Britain will send lifesaving emergency aid to help thousands of children facing severe hunger across the Sahel region of West Africa, Andrew Mitchell announced today.

The International Development Secretary said vital therapeutic food from Britain will reach 68,000 children in Chad, Mali and Niger, three of the countries worst affected by poor harvests.

Andrew Mitchell also urged rich countries with a significant presence in West Africa to take the lead on the international response in the same way Britain has led lifesaving efforts in the Horn of Africa.

Across the Sahel more than 6.8 million people are at risk of severe food shortages due to insufficient rains, poor crop production and a lack of availability of pasture for livestock. Additionally, food prices at local markets are far too high for many families to afford.

British support will also provide aid for fodder and vaccinations to keep livestock alive, so that 30,000 people can continue to feed themselves despite the drought. The UK will support a further 47,000 people through direct transfers, such as food, to the very poorest families. This will prevent them being forced to sell off their livestock and other possessions.

Andrew Mitchell, Secretary of State for International Development, said:

"We know this crisis is coming and Britain is responding early to warning signs. We are acting now to help thousands of people who are facing a severe food crisis. Our aid will help feed children in desperate need and keep vital livestock alive.

"British support will help those in the most immediate danger but others nations must take up the baton to ensure that the international response is fast and effective. We then need to improve conditions for these people to withstand future droughts.

"Britain acted quickly in the Horn of Africa and I strongly urge similarly swift leadership from our partners in the Sahel."

British humanitarian experts are undertaking missions to the Sahel to assess the scale of the looming crisis. The Prime Minister said he would look closely at the situation during Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday.

Some British emergency aid is already reaching the region through the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund – to which the Britain is a major contributor. The fund has so far released £7.8 million for initial humanitarian work in Niger and Chad.

Notes to editors

- Britain is already funding the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which is promoting agricultural-led economic growth to reduce poverty. A number of Sahelian countries have prepared investment plans for CAADP.
- Britain is also a major funder of the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR) which includes Niger as one the priority countries. PPCR is supporting a \$63m programme in Niger to improve the resilience of the populations and production systems to climate change and variability, in order to increase national food security.
- The Prime Minister's response to a question from Mark Lazarowicz at PMQ's on January 18th 2012 can be found here (column 747):
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120118/debtext/120118-0001.htm#12011848000009>

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