

Rann/Kala Balge – Rapid Assessment

Key Messages for Decision Makers

- The food security situation is critical amongst newly arrived IDPs. During the past week preceding the assessment, almost 300 people were brought into Rann by the Nigerian Security Forces. More people are expected to arrive, as a result of the ongoing military operations.
- Before the crisis, main source of livelihood was farming and livestock rearing. At the moment, source of livelihood includes casual labor, sale of firewood and petty trading. Women are involved in cow-dung gathering, which is sold and used as cooking fuel.
- IDPs and residents invariably had limited farm lands, due to the security threat, hence resulting in reduced food crop production. Though the populations are allowed to practice farming activities within a radius of 4-5 km, local populations are reluctant to go beyond 2-3 km. This confinement of agricultural activities within a limited perimeter has not permitted dry season agriculture (irrigation lands are beyond 5 km).
- Before the conflict, Kala Balge Local Government had about 4 important markets: Sigal (6 km distance from Rann); Kala (about 22 km), Gaulfa (36 km) and Jilbe (58 km). The largest market amongst them was Sigal, which attracted a lot of sellers and buyers from Nigeria and Cameroun. At the moment, only Rann market is operating.
- Both IDPs and host populations have access to the market. Compared to last year, the number of food vendors operating in the market has almost doubled, although the commercial activities are yet to reach pre-crisis level.
- The market can gradually absorb an increased demand resulting from cash based interventions till May. During the rainy season, Rann is cut from Gamborou/Ngala axis, hence making impossible for traders to bring in staple foods (imported rice, maize, millet and beans).
- Compared to last year, access to food has slightly improved due to humanitarian assistance and harvest of food crops resulting from the rainy season production. However, the level of food availability is still below pre-crisis level. Before the crisis, domestic food stocks could last up to August in a production year, while harvest from 2017 agricultural season will barely last till March 2018.
- Exhaustive MUAC screening of children 6-59 months shows Global Acute Malnutrition rate (GAM) at (11%) of which 2% are severely acute malnourish. Significant improvement is seen in the nutrition situation of the population when compared with August 2017 MUAC screening result, which reported GAM and SAM, rates of 18% and 4% respectively. However, the malnutrition situation is still at a serious stage according to WHO classification, and requires more attention.
- Kala/Balge LGA was not covered by the recent EFSA (September/October 2017), hence not analyzed during the October 2017 Cadre Harmonise. An EFSA is currently ongoing to collect detailed information on food security situation, in order to inform decision markers. This assessment will provide clearer details on the case load of vulnerable populations within these communities
- Food assistance is still required both for new arrivals and IDPs living in collective settlements. Food security actors should transition to early recovery or livelihood support for host populations who have access to land.

1. Background

The precarious security environment in northeastern Nigeria continues to limit movement, hinder agriculture activities from being fully practiced in LGAs of Borno state. Agriculture was the mainstay of economic and livelihood activities in many LGAs in Borno before the conflict started. With this disruption on livelihood activities, household food availability, access to basic services as well as the functionality of local markets and income generating activities has been significantly hampered. The recent military operations in wards close to Rann and surrounding LGAs to Kala/Balge have led to the influx of IDPs to Rann.

Information about the current overall population in Rann stands around 70,000 individuals. The vast majority of people hail from Rann, Kala, Jilbe, Jarawa and Daima Abori Wards of Kala/Balge LGA.

Influx of new IDP arrivals was reported from Bama LGA area (500 since the beginning of January). Women and children are believed to have been worst affected by the conflict. Main communities in Rann are: Ajari, Bulamari, Kelagouru, General hospital and boarding primary school. IDP population are more in number than the host populations (the estimation is given as 80% IDPs, 20% host population), with main host communities been Ajari and Bulamari, while the highest concentration of IDPs are within camps in Kelagouru IDP camp, Boarding primary school camp and General hospital camp. Returnees were population that were displaced in Cameroun, Maiduguri and Ngala, and have returned back to Rann.

Amongst the humanitarian agencies on ground identified by the respondents include: ICRC, MSF, UNICEF, Care International, CHAD, IOM, OXFAM, UNHCR. According information gotten in MSF had distributed mosquito nets, UNICEF attending to nutrition cases for children and women, OXFAM has been involved in the distribution of jerry cans and one off cash distribution of 5,000 Naira to 7,800 IDPs households.

This assessment sought to collate data on the food security situation, market condition, availability of phone network, humanitarian needs and population movements. This will be a source of additional information in the ongoing WFP/OXFAM emergency food security assessment, which will provide WFP evidence-based information for decision making.

2. Methodology

The assessment was conducted on the 2nd of December, 2017. It was done by key informant interview and FGDs. The focus group discussions was with key informant interviews (KII), market leaders, traders, men and women. A group of IDPs, host communities and newly arrived IDPs were amongst those interviewed in the panel for the FGDs. Discussions centered around access to food, livelihood activities, access to markets, coping strategies adopted by households and daily wages for laborers and humanitarian assistance/aid received.

3. General Overview

- **Food security situation:** households reported that the food security situation has improved mainly attributed to the food aid and cash transfer received from ICRC and OXFAM. Also more households cultivated few plots of land as compared to last year. However, amongst the newly arrived IDPs the situation is critical. Women said before their rescue, they survived in their villages by digging ant hills and collecting remains of food/grains stored away by ants. This stored food/grains is cooked and eaten, however on arrival to Rann, these households have had to rely heavily on food from relatives and the community.

- **Food availability:** before the conflict, neighboring wards in Rann practiced dry season farming (irrigation farming of onions, sweet pepper and rice), therefore the food stock is seen to be low by August, as it signifies the peak of the lean season in this part of the country. With the advent of the conflict irrigation farming is no more practiced further exacerbating the already strained agricultural production. Food availability in stock is expected to be low from March 2018, according to the farming households interviewed, considering that few households had access to land of which smaller plots of farm lands were cultivated.
- **Agricultural Production:** access to land is a challenge, as farming activities can only be done within a safe distance of 2-3 km from Rann town. This is due to security risk of attacks on farm lands. Lands were given to some IDPs by the host community and Bulama (community leaders), however the IDPs reported that only 20% have access to land. The average farm size cultivated is 0.5 ha, pre-crisis farming households cultivated an average of 5-6 ha. As compared to the previous year, most households with access to land practiced agriculture in Rann.
- **Infrastructures:** the major challenge residents face is road access, as the roads leading into Rann can remain blocked for 3 to 4 months, when the rainy season begins or periods when water is released from the Cameroon dam; this causes flooding on the major roads, hindering movement in or out of Rann. The general surroundings are remote characterized by very poor infrastructures including bad and untarred roads that further contribute in the delay in delivery of commodities, no established markets with permanent buildings, the market is primarily an open space with wooden tents and few stalls (temporal features), no electricity at the moment, electrical energy is powered by generators by a few.
- **Financial services:** no bank is functional in Rann. Prior to conflict Union bank was operational. Therefore, cash access is mainly via CBT interventions accrued from disbursement by NGOs and by few households that travel to Maiduguri to access cash from banks.
- **Telephone network:** The existing mobile money service Phone network are Nexttel (with a stronger network strength) and MTN Cameroun telecommunication providers. The network allows browsing facility and WhatsApp etc. Traders informed the team during the FGDs of how the phone communication was very key for them in placing orders, by communicating with their suppliers in Ngala to send in products.
- **Security:** general security situation has been stable for some time now, although the situation is fluid in the immediate environs. With ongoing military operations, resulting in the recent influx of 300 individuals 3 days before this assessment was conducted. Security situation has improved. However, movement from Rann to Gomboru/Ngala and Maiduguri is done with military escort provided.
- **Markets:** Rann market operates on Thursdays, the market is patronized by customers from Rann, Cameroun and Ngala. Fishes are brought into Nigeria and sold by Cameroonians, while maize or guinea corn is bought and transported back. About 400 to 500 wholesale and retail traders operate on market days. The proportion of this traders are comprised of retailers and wholesalers. Market in Rann is accessible throughout the year with major supplies of staples gotten from Gomboru/Ngala market, the major staples are rice, maize, beans and sorghum in order of their importance. Staple food commodities are widely available in Rann markets of Kala Balge. The prices of food commodities in the markets of Rann are determined by individual traders and the initial cost of purchase from Gomboru Ngala markets.

Market	Food commodity	Current price	August price	% Change in current price	Degree of change
Rann	Imported rice	350	400	-12.5%	↓
	Maize	200	250	-20.0%	↓
	Sorghum	150	180	-16.7%	↓
	Beans	350	400	-12.5%	↓

- **Main trade routes:** at the moment the only market operating in Kala Balge is the Rann market; traders buy staples from Gomboru Ngala markets which is about 36 km and neighboring Bodo market (6 km away) and Abiamo markets in Cameroun is another market patronized by traders from Rann which is about an hour journey.
- **Traders' business and response capacity:** in the event of a 50 percentage point increase in demand, the traders in Rann markets will be able to deliver adequate stocks within a week. On the same note the traders will be able to meet a demand of 50 percentage increase, with adequate supply of stocks in their shops. The traders said they have where to store their products in a situation where the need to increase supply due to an increased demand.
- **Constraints to traders:** lack of capital, insecurity and difficulty in transporting goods during rainy season due to bad roads are the three main constraints affecting traders in Rann.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

- The food security situation is critical especially amongst recently arrived IDP, who depend on food assistance from the community and relatives. There is therefore an urgent need to provide assistance to new arrivals. It's worth noting that more people are expecting to come in as a result of military operations.
- Rann is almost inaccessible during the rainy season (from June to August). Therefore, humanitarian organizations should factor in this major constraint that could prevent timely delivery of emergency assistance during the most critical period (lean season).
- In view of the inaccessibility of the roads due to rainy season and more recently due to the opening of dam from Cameroun, resulting in flooding of major feeder roads, there is a need for the prepositioning of emergency food stock in Rann as a buffer to respond to critical situations like this that hamper food availability in a timely manner.
- Under the current circumstances, direct cash transfer or use of voucher can be used for CBT implementation, although due to insecurity, agricultural production and poor roads direct food aid may be considered as a buffer for periods when the roads are closed and markets food stocks are affected.
- An in-depth market assessment is ongoing, which will provide more details on the market situation and functionality in Rann.