



5 february 2014 – Although the Sahel region occasionally comes with good news, like [free school meals for children](#) in Chad, or the [Desert Music Festival](#) – most of the news remain focused on malnutrition, humanitarian assistance or [transnational crime](#).

Today we've got good news - and bad news.

Bad news is that over 20 million people in the Sahel will need humanitarian assistance in 2014, up 8.7 million over the number of people in need in 2013, according to UN estimates.

Driving the surge in the numbers of people going hungry is a severe deterioration in people's access to affordable food in northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon and Senegal. Together, these countries represent over 40 percent of the overall food insecurity caseload, says the UN.

At five million, the number of malnourished children under age five remains more or less the same as in 2013.

Among the vulnerable are 1.6 million displaced people across the region, with communities

fleeing the Central African Republic, northeastern Nigeria, Mali and Sudan, putting pressure on vulnerable populations in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

But the good news is that the UN and the international community is shifting its approach to help Sahel's 20 million hungry.

An ambitious three-year [Sahel strategy](#) has been launched, and the UN, which will re-issue annual funding asks over the coming three-year period, is calling for US\$2 billion this year, up from the \$1.7 billion requested last year.

"Life saving is still the first priority, without question," said the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, Robert Piper. "But we need to be more ambitious in terms of the tasks we set ourselves, including going beyond saving lives. Twelve-month plans do not work in a region where the problems are so chronic. Business as usual is not going to break these cycles," UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, Robert Piper told [IRIN News](#) .

It can take three successive good harvests to recover from one poor year, but increasingly frequent repeated droughts are making such recovery impossible for many families.

According to the new strategy, all actors need to step up their range of activities, which include building food stocks; distributing drought-resistant seeds on time; improving use of the limited water supply, preventative vaccination and timely destocking of animals; pre-positioning supplies; increasing village food stocks; promoting investment in scientific research; and improving water points for pastoralists and farmers.

The new strategy prioritizes early warning, early response and working in direct partnership with governments and development actors.

And the Desert Festival, although in exile, will take place this year as well.