



Photo: NRC/Hilde Jørgensen

# Waiting for Cholera Season

Critical need for sanitation facilities in North East Nigeria

Every year for the last ten years, deadly cholera outbreaks have erupted with the onset of the rain season in the Lake Chad Basin. This year's mass influx of newly displaced people into already overcrowded camps, coupled with a serious gap in sanitation and hygiene, puts thousands at serious risk. If not immediately addressed, people are left defenceless as waterborne disease again will start to spread with the upcoming rain season in 2019.

## An anticipated crisis

Registered cholera cases in North East Nigeria in 2018 tipped 10,000, with more than 175 registered deaths (although the actual number may be higher). Over the last decade, the region has been affected by cholera on a yearly basis due to poor sanitation facilities and hygiene. The situation is especially precarious in some areas and camps. OCHA warns of critical overcrowding coupled with gap in sanitation as posing a serious risk ahead of the upcoming 'cholera season', and the number of latrines are dangerously low<sup>1</sup>. For example, in the transitional camp 'Teachers Village' in Maiduguri, mass influx of new arrivals has left **'thousands of people sleeping outside in the open and living in extremely overcrowded and deplorable conditions'**. The insufficiency forces people to defecate in the open, exasperating an already vulnerable situation. Increased access to clean

water, and at least 10 times as many latrines, are needed in order to meet minimum standards for safety and dignity.

## Key figures<sup>2</sup>

- Of 400,000 people needing *emergency shelter* in 2019, just over 2,288 people have been reached
- Of people targeted for assistance in improved *sanitation facilities*, 20% are met
- Of people targeted for assistance with access to *safe drinking water*, 24% are met

## The widows of Bolori

A metal gate opens into a private estate turned an informal camp for displaced people in Bolori, Maiduguri. Rows of makeshift shelters made of sticks wrapped in cloths and shawls cling to the surrounding walls or lean against each other. There

<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian Situation Update January 2019

<sup>2</sup> Based on needs according to Nigeria's Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019. The numbers refer to people reached by end of January 2019

are a few men around, but mainly women and children are living in this camp after being forced to flee the recent wave of attacks in the region. That a large majority of the households here are female-headed, is not uncommon. 87% of the newly displaced people in the region are believed to be women and children<sup>3</sup>. Behind a myriad of colourful fabrics, hundreds of families seek protection: nursing mothers, children, and grandmothers. They have no latrines and no clean water. **Two pits and a shackle of straw serve the purpose of toilets for the whole community, and they are unshielded.** That poses a large protection risk, especially for women. A plastic bag must serve the purpose of toilet for many, used hidden from sight within their shelters. During the dry Harmattan, dust and wind may result in devastating fires in a camp like this. A small spark from a cooking pot is all it takes. In only a couple of months, however, rain season is starting. The ground will then turn to mud, causing havoc for family staying in a shelter without floors. Fabric roofs will also leak and tear and provides little protection from rain. **The potentially deadly disease will thrive and spread quickly in conditions such as these.** Without more solid structures, drainage systems, separated latrines and protected water sources, the hundreds or possibly thousands living in this camp are almost guaranteed to be affected.

#### **Cholera is:**

*...a bacterial disease which infects through food or water. While a majority does not show symptoms, a minority develop acute watery diarrhoea causing severe dehydration that may kill within hours. The bacteria remain in faeces for up to 10 days before being shed back into the environment. Safe and protected water sources and proper sanitation facilities are critical to prevent it from spreading.*

### **NRC recommendations:**

#### **To donors and the humanitarian community:**

- Urgently increase priority of and support to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene responses, as well as Shelter, in order to curb the consequences of the upcoming cholera outbreak, and to effectively end the cycle of yearly cholera outbreaks as is witnessed in the region.

#### **To the Federal Government of Nigeria and relevant State authorities:**

- To provide increased support to camp management and coordination, including urgently to identify available land to decongest overcrowded camps and provide space for the construction of lifesaving facilities, such as latrines, wherever relevant and critical.



**Photo:** Open for anyone to see and just a few meters away from the nearest shelter, the communal latrine not only poses a risk in terms of disease, but also poses a serious protection concern.

Other relevant information:

- Press Statement “Urgent need to improve hygiene facilities” (Nov 2018) ([link](#))

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