



## News

### Water scarcity causing food insecurity in Mali

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*Scarcity of water is making it almost impossible to grow food in Gao. Charles Bambara stresses the urgency of acting now to solve the [West Africa food crisis](#).*

The city of Gao, lying along the Niger river, is attracting more and more herders and pastoralists coming from as far as the Kidal region further north, or from neighbouring countries like Niger.



Only 40km outside Gao, in Echag, a camping village, the land is dry - too dry to sustain any trees. Only horn trees remain, a few last leaves fought over by hungry goats and camels. The desolation is visible. Many families have abandoned hope of remaining in this, their ancestral land. Yet still some nomadic families in this area are struggling beyond odds to continue life here.

Gao, 1250km north of Mali. One of the few regions affected by the ongoing food crisis in West Africa. Photo: Charles Bambara/Oxfam

Water is scarce. "If nothing happens in the coming four weeks, our cattle will be starving to death. We are already struggling to guarantee food for our children and women," said Mohamed, one of the chiefs at Djibok, a large camping station with many wells. The wells are attracting thousands of people with camels, sheep, goats and donkeys seeking water.

Cattle here are desperate for pastures and for water, and they're coming from all over the region, sometimes from more than 200km away. We were surprised to see some young boys digging new wells, as they are at risk of drying up in a few weeks, and many herders don't expect the place to sustain life beyond the end of April. Their plan is to look lower down for green pastures - which are themselves becoming rare because of the concentration of cattle.

#### Time is running out

"This is the third consecutive year with insufficient rains," said Wanalher Ag Alwaly, food security expert from Tassaght, a local partner of Oxfam. "The severity and this current alarming situation are mainly due to past climate stress which is culminating this year."

"Transhumance [moving to higher pastures in summer and to lower valleys in winter] began in January, six months earlier than usual," stressed Suleiman a Tuaregm, a member of another local NGO in Gao. "The rush with cattle is increasing

### This blogger

Charles is Oxfam's Regional Media Officer in West Africa.

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