**DJIBO: LIFE UNDER BLOCKADE**

Burkina Faso is experiencing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that has seen 1.99 million internally displaced people flee violence perpetrated by jihadist groups (OCHA, 31 March 2023). The northern town of Djibo has now been under blockade by non-state armed groups for over a year and remains largely cut off from food and aid. The movement of the population is restricted and access to basic services has been severely affected, leaving the population surviving with little food, water, electricity, and limited means of communication. The ongoing clashes between the Burkinabe defence and security forces and non-state armed groups on the outskirts of Djibo have resulted in a mass influx of people seeking refuge in the town. Of the 300,000 inhabitants, almost 270,000 (269,894 according to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation: CONASUR) are internally displaced, half of whom are children, living in camps or with host families.

Caught in the conflict, living conditions are deteriorating rapidly and the community is surviving by means of humanitarian assistance. Unable even to find salt, resources are so scarce that for long periods of time, inhabitants have resorted to eating leaves. "I had nothing left to eat for my children," said Safi, a 30-year-old internally displaced mother of five. Safi left her village of Yalanga, 100 km from Djibo, with her entire family, her husband was killed on the way by armed groups. Her daily life is marked by distributions from the World Food Programme as she looks for small household jobs to survive.

"It's getting a little bit better these days," she says, on 21 March, as a convoy of food and necessities finally managed to reach Djibo, under armed escort, four months after the last supplies reached the town. The improvement is notable, even if the combined effects of the food and security crisis remain critical.

The difficulties in accessing Djibo have led to an alarming food and nutrition crisis, the extent of which is difficult to measure. With insufficient information on the nutritional status of the population, actors struggle to adapt their responses. Since the first warnings in October 2022, several organisations have mobilised, but aid is still largely insufficient. Nutritional activities implemented in recent weeks are responding to the needs of malnourished children, but the lack of food and perspectives for the coming months remains deeply concerning.

On 8 and 9 April, MSF teams distributed 57 tonnes of BP-5 biscuits to 12,456 children aged between 6 months and 5 years, which is equivalent to a month's worth of food. BP-5 biscuits are used as a nutritional supplement to prevent malnutrition in children (a fortified food with high energy value based on cereals: cooked wheat flour, fat, vegetable oil, sugar, soya protein, vitamins, and minerals). This distribution has temporarily contributed to responding to the immediate needs of a large portion of the population.

Access to health care is also heavily affected by the blockade: most medical staff have left and difficulties in obtaining medicines have led to the closure of several facilities. Those that remain are operating at minimal capacity, with limited capacity to respond to an already extremely vulnerable population. "We are living in great suffering", said one community leader.

Since 2018, MSF in collaboration with the Ministry of Health has been supporting Djibo medical centre with a surgical unit (centre médical à antenne chirurgicale), two advanced health posts and three community health sites.

At the medical centre with a surgical unit, patient care is free: patients and their families receive three meals a day. The surgery and the emergency care unit are autonomous thanks to solar panels installed by MSF.

MSF is also working on the rehabilitation of water points and building boreholes, facilitating access to drinking water for the inhabitants whilst also reducing risks for women who no longer need to walk long distances to fetch water.

Hamadoum Moussa, health promotion supervisor, explains "In addition to what MSF is doing for the people of Djibo, we also have been supported, do not forget that this situation had an impact on us and our families". Food supplies were flown in at the height of the blockade to ensure supply to our teams, who continued to work tirelessly. Despite the extremely difficult context, solidarity and social cohesion prevail in the city and our teams as they respond to the ever-growing needs of the community.