

By Monde Kingsley Nfor

UNDER a scorching sun, with temperatures soaring to over 40 degrees Celsius, Lara Adama's family is forced to dig for water from a dried-out river bed in Dumai, in northern Cameroon.

This is one of the rivers that used to flow into the shrinking Lake Chad but there is not much water here.

There has been a nine-month-long drought in the region and Adama tells IPS that her family "digs out the sand on this river bed to tap water."

"We depend on this water for everything in the house," Adama, a villager in Mokolo in Cameroon's Far North Region, says.

A cholera outbreak has been declared in Adama's village. But she and other community members have no choice but to get their water from this river.

The lone borehole in this village of about 1,500 people is out of use due to technical problems.

"Every family comes here to retrieve drinking water. Our animals too depend on this water source to survive. When we come after the animals have already polluted a hole,

we simply dig another to avoid any health problems," she says.

This region is threatened by extreme water shortages and climate variability. Barren soils constitute some 25 to 30 percent of the surface area of this region. Lake Chad is rapidly shrinking while Lake Fianga dried up completely in December 1984.

Gregor Binkert, World Bank country director for Cameroon, says that a water-related crisis is prevalent in the north and there is an increased need for protection from floods and drought, which are affecting people more regularly.

"Northern Cameroon is characterised by high poverty levels, and it is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate shocks, including frequent droughts and floods," Binkert explains.

The protracted droughts in Far North Region have triggered a sharp increase in cholera cases. The outbreak is mainly concentrated in the Mayo-Tsanaga region as all its six health districts have cases of the infectious disease. The current outbreak has already resulted in more than 200 deaths out of the 1,500 cholera cases reported here since June.

According to Cameroon's

