



Food situation in the Sahel and West Africa: Will locusts jeopardise the good agricultural season forecast?

1. Optimism

Various information sources indicate that despite a difficult start, the Sahel and most of West Africa will experience a good agricultural season.

The general consensus (Sahel and West African countries, the CILSS, FAO, Fews Net, WFP) emanating from the regional meeting on agricultural and food perspectives in the Sahel and West Africa, held on 26-28 September 2006 in Mindelo/Cape Verde, indicates that the estimated cereal production for CILSS member countries would be between **11.5 and 15 million tonnes**.

Although the situation has not yet been assessed, available indications indicate that the pessimist scenario of 11.5 million tonnes of cereal production is very unlikely because the rainy season continued into the first ten days of October in many of the countries. A significant amount of rain fell in Burkina Faso from 12 to 18 October. Natural pastures have also grown fairly well on the whole. This environment leads to the belief that production could be at the higher end of the forecast, around 15 million tonnes.

In addition to this general analysis, some areas will nonetheless experience a decline in production due to delays in rainfall, pockets of drought and floods in September, etc.

The food situation is generally satisfactory and statistics indicate a decline or stability in cereal prices. Markets appear to be receiving supplies regularly and domestic as well as inter-country trade continues. Several NGOs, such as Afrique Verte, are particularly active in stimulating domestic and cross-border cereal trade between countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

However, some population groups – particularly refugees or internally displaced persons in conflict areas, such as in Chad or Guinea Bissau – are facing a precarious food situation despite the good agricultural season.

2. Maintaining vigilance

2.1 The locust situation seems to be under control

In Mauritania, the locust situation is potentially worrying because of the appearance of locusts in the North-West of the country. A warning has been sounded. Although the situation seems relatively calm, field teams have said that new outbreaks are possible, depending on the rainfall situation. This could be a threat if meteorological and environmental conditions remain favourable.

Land-based teams have been conducting anti-locust treatment operations in Mauritania since 9 October 2006 and the situation is under control. In fact, the current level of pesticide, equipment and human resources is sufficient so as to enable Mauritania to face the situation, demonstrating that lessons have been drawn from the experience of the last outbreak.

This current locust situation offers experts the opportunity to test other, more ecological alternatives, among which is the use of *Metarhizium anisopliae* fungi.

This locust threat is occurring at a time when most cereal or leguminous crops harvests are over or almost over.

2.2 Persistence of nutritional problems

Although the current food situation appears to be relatively good overall, with fairly good cereal production forecasts, information sources indicate that malnutrition rates remain high.

In an African Press Association release (APPA - Association de la Presse Africaine <http://fr.groups.yahoo.com/group/presseafricaine>) of 11 October 2006, the WFP pointed out that 37% of children under 5 years old in CILSS member countries are chronically undernourished and that 1.4 million of them suffer from acute malnutrition – hence the importance of maintaining greater vigilance with regard to this issue.

3. What should the response be? What should we be vigilant about?

- a. Although the locust situation in Mauritania appears under control, it is important to be **prepared and mobilise the** international community and regional actors, in case the problem worsens. The FAO is already launching some activities in this regard, but its efforts need to be taken further and supported by regional actors in the Sahel and West Africa.
- b. The current locust warning confirms the latent and structural nature of the threat they pose. The establishment of a **permanent, sustainable monitoring, warning and response mechanism should remain on the agenda.**
- c. In addition, greater strategic thinking and action is needed with regard to structural malnourishment issues. The 2005 food crisis in Niger has painfully emphasised this issue. Fews Net decided to tackle the problem and came up with interesting results. Concrete actions need to be undertaken – not only with regard to improving information systems, but also concrete investments within the policy framework, in particular with regard to development and food security.
- d. Although agricultural production forecasts appear to be good overall for the Sahel and West Africa, the issue of refugees or internally displaced persons due to conflicts remains a concern in the region. Hence, the need to **already start thinking about relief measures for population groups affected by these conflicts.**
- e. Effective implementation of **development plans to reduce the vulnerability of populations affected by the September floods** in the Sahel. These plans could be based on the following approach:
- Promotion or development of off-season crops (maize, flood-recession sorghum, fruits and vegetables, etc.) by capitalising on water impoundments and wetland water management. The improvement of producers' access to some innovations (seeds, production techniques, equipment, etc.) and market services, etc. could be key elements of this approach.
 - Development of other agricultural production activities and/or income-generating activities such as the seasonal production of milk and meat, and non-agricultural economic activities in order to strengthen the capacity of affected households to have access to food.

▶▶ Information Sources

This analytical note was prepared on the basis of information provided by different specialised institutions. For greater details, you are invited to consult the following documents and visit the following websites:

CILSS/Agrhymet, 2006. Agrhymet Monthly, Issue No. M07/06, September 2006, 15 p.

CILSS/SE, 2006. Regional meeting on agricultural and food prospects in the Sahel and West Africa – Crop Year 2006-2007, Mindelo/Cape Verde, 26-28 September 2006, 3 p.

CILSS/SE, 2006. Press release: 11 to 15 million tonnes of cereals expected this year in the Sahel, ICDCS/SE, 2 p.

Fews Net, 2006: Executive Overview of Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa, September 27, 2006, 2 p.

Fews Net, 2006: Africa Weather Hazards benefits Assessment for October 12 – 18, 2006, 2 p.

Fews Net, 2006: Niger: Monthly Food Security Report, September 2006, 6 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Chad: Monthly Food Security Report, September 2006, 5 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Burkina Faso: Monthly Food Security Report, September 2006, 5 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Mauritania: Monthly Food Security Report, September 2006, 3 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Senegal: Monthly Food Security Report, September 2006, 4 p.

WPF, 2006: *La fin de la saison maigre ne rime pas avec la fin de la souffrance pour les enfants du Sahel* – Press Release (<http://fr.groups.yahoo.com/group/presseafricaine>), 11 October 2006

FAO, 2006: Newsroom: Will the Desert Locust strike again? FAO, Rome 11 October 2006 (<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/fr/news/2006/1000418/index.html>)

FAO, 2006: More crickets feared in North-West Mauritania (<http://www.fao.org/ag/locust/fr/info/info/index.html>)

UN, 2006: New locust upsurge could threaten North and West Africa, UN agency warns. UN News Service (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/printnews.asp?nid=20208>)

Afrique Verte, 2006: Point sur la situation alimentaire au Sahel: Information sur les prix des céréales: Burkina Faso – Mali – Niger: Suivi de campagne, Issue No.66, Point in early October 2006, 5 p.

OCHA, 2006: Afrique de l'Ouest : Cartographie de la situation humanitaire (West Africa: Mapping of the humanitarian situation) – September 2006 (<http://humanitarianinfo.org/westafrica>)

DGPSA, 2006: AgriAlerte, Issues no. 008-23/09/2006; 009-26/09/2006; 010-05/10/2006 (www.sisa.africa-web.org)

SWAC: www.oecd.org/sah

CLISS: www.cilss.bf & www.agrhymet.ne

Fews Net: www.fews.net

FAO: www.fao.org

WFP: www.wfp.org

Afrique Verte: www.afriqueverte.org

OCHA: www.humanitarianinfo.org & <http://ochaonline.un.org/>

►►► For sustainable management of locust outbreaks in the Sahel and West Africa

The recent locust threat in Mauritania, following the one in 2005, is a wake-up call for regional actors to take concrete actions to deal with this scourge.

On this account, the SWAC, the CILSS and ECOWAS are carrying out strategic thinking on the implementation of a joint initiative for the sustainable management of the locust threat.

One objective: Enable the Sahel and West Africa region to set up a sustainable regional surveillance, warning and response mechanism.

One purpose: Acquire the necessary capabilities to control, limit and eradicate the scourge at the local level, before it spreads.

A new approach:

- a. Make use of the current environment, in particular the existence of organised local actors with decision-making and action-oriented powers, such as Professional Agricultural Associations, as well as local authorities
- b. Set up functional mechanisms between different levels: local, national, sub-regional and regional, in the field of surveillance, warning and response

►►► Cross-border dimension of Food Security in the Sahel and West Africa

Following the excellent results achieved by the joint mission (CILSS, Fews Net, Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), WAMIS-net, UNICEF, OCHA and WFP) between 11-19 May 2006 in the cross-border region of Maradi, Katsina and Kano (see report at: <http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001083.pdf> and <http://www.afriquefrontieres.org>), the SWAC and the CILSS are planning to implement an initiative to take into consideration the cross-border dimension in the sustainable management of food security. This initiative, which has been envisaged in accordance with a broader scope of the cross-border dynamic in the Sahel and West African region, is currently at the strategic thinking stage and a concept note will soon be available for all actors concerned by the issue.

►►► For a better understanding of nutritional aspects of food security

This is an issue of concern for all actors interested in managing the food crisis in the Sahel and West Africa. In this connection, Fews Net has published documents that provide a better understanding of the issue, as well as its incorporation in information systems on food security. These documents may be downloaded from the Fews Net website.

1 (Fr.) Comment comprendre les données nutritionnelles et les causes de la malnutrition au Niger ?
Rapport spécial du réseau des Systèmes d'Alerte Précoce contre la Famine (Fews Net), Juin 2006

<http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001071.pdf>

2 (Fr.) Alerte précoce de nutrition et sécurité alimentaire au Niger : Recommandations au Réseau des Systèmes d'Alerte Précoce contre la Famine (Fews Net) et ses partenaires en ce qui concerne la surveillance et le traitement des lacunes au niveau des informations au Niger
Juin 2006

<http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001070.pdf>

1 (Eng.) Understanding nutrition data and the causes of malnutrition in Niger
A special report by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (Fews Net), June 2006

<http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001044.pdf>

2 (Eng.) Nutrition and food security early warning in Niger:
Recommendations for the Famine early Warning Systems Network (Fews Net) and partners to monitor and address the information gaps in Niger June 2006

<http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001045.pdf>
