



The food situation in the Sahel:

There are reasons to be hopeful, but Niger, Mauritania and Guinea Bissau still merit particular attention

1. Overview of the general agriculture and food situation

Analysis conducted by several institutions (Agrhymet, Fews Net, FAO) indicate that rainfall is returning to normal levels after very poor conditions at the start of the season which delayed sowing and re-sowing in several countries.

The food situation is also generally satisfactory. However there are a few localised pockets of food insecurity due to problems of accessibility, in some countries such as Niger, Mauritania and Guinea Bissau. On the whole, cereal markets are stable and prices are beginning to dip in certain areas.

The desert locust situation is good despite a few isolated solitarious adults in southern Mauritania, northern Mali and Niger.

2. A cause for optimism

2.1 Assessment of the agricultural campaign

Despite several regional disparities, July saw a return to more normal levels of rainfall. Heavy rains in July gradually compensated for earlier dry spells, easing fears that the season would be a very poor one.

With regard to locusts, FAO bulletin No.334 of 3/x/2006 (www.fao.org/news/global/locust/locuhome.htm) confirms that the problem is greatly reduced since the start of the season.

2.2 Food situation

Information sources indicate that the availability of food is generally satisfactory. There is no noticeable tension in cereal markets, confirming the May-June 2006 findings of the joint CILSS/SWAC/FEWS NET/OCHA/WFP/WAMIS NET/UNICEF project in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi transborder area.

In general, markets have remained stable

following price increases in June. Millet prices have in fact fallen in certain CILSS member countries, although a small increase was observed in northern Nigeria (see below).

3. Maintaining a close watch

3.1 General situation

With regard to agriculture, although levels of rainfall were more encouraging in July, certain regional disparities should be highlighted.

While a good season remains possible given the return of the rains, the crucial phase – fructification and ripening of cereals – is still to come, and rainfall during September and October will be decisive in this. Rain must also continue to fall beyond July in order for hopes to be met! However, compared to the average for this period, there has been quite a severe shortage of rain in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and in north-western Nigeria/eastern Niger. Here, farmers are substituting cereals for shorter-cycle crops (cowpeas and wandzou). If the shortage of rain continues, this could have repercussions for the regulation of markets throughout the West African region.

With regard to the food situation, does the slight increase in cereal prices in northern Nigeria fuel traders' expectations of poor harvests, or a more difficult lean period than expected? This trend must be closely monitored!!!

3.2 Niger

Although there is no shortage of available food, access is still a problem. Poorer communities are still affected by the 2004-2005 crisis: total exhaustion of their food stocks and financial resources. In June there was a slight increase in millet prices on certain markets (+13% at Zinder, +11% at Maradi and +9% at Tahoua). This situation, due to strong demand during busy farming periods and a decrease in supply, may further threaten access to food by vulnerable populations.

The last assessment indicates that 60% of the population is either in a state of food insecurity or at risk. The situation is more perturbing in Dosso, Tahoua and Tillabéri. In these regions, the most affected areas

are Keita, Illéla, Tchintabaraden, Loga, Bouza, Doutchi, Téra, Ouallam and Gaya.

3.3 *The Situation in other Sahelian countries (Guinea Bissau, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso)*

In **Guinea Bissau**, three months after the WFP launched an appeal for this country, no contributions had been registered by 15 August 2006 (see http://www.wfp.org/operations/current_operations/ResUpdates/EMOPSUMMARY.pdf).

In **Chad**, the situation created by war and instability in the east of the country remains a cause for concern, particularly with regard to refugees, displaced persons and host communities. The number of people displaced by humanitarian agencies is estimated at 40,000, mainly among the agro-pastoral population in the Assoungha and Dar Sila districts. Conflict hinders the progress of the agricultural campaign, exacerbating problems of access to farmland and pasture. A massive influx of refugees from Central Africa into the south of the country makes this situation all the more worrying.

Nutrition must also be closely monitored in Kanem, where a relative increase in cereal prices on the market could potentially place the population at risk.

In **Mauritania**, access to food commodities remains problematic as household purchasing power has been diminished by consecutive poor harvests in recent years. Thankfully, an increase in cereal supplies from Mali has improved commercial availability leading to an appreciable drop in prices for off-season recessional sorghum (-10 UM).

In **Burkina Faso**, flooding has been reported in the north-east (Gorom-Gorom and Makoye). The damage

has not yet been assessed due to the inaccessibility of the areas affected. In some places, pasture land has been flooded, which could adversely impact the feeding of animals. Affected areas could thus be faced with food insecurity and the outbreak of disease. This situation should be closely monitored.

4. What should the response be? What merits closest attention?

- a. Even if market stability continues into July, the slight increase in cereals prices in northern Nigeria creates a situation which should be closely monitored. The same applies to the circumstances and level of market supply in areas where the start of the agricultural campaign has been difficult. Hence the need to follow the evolution of cereals markets (prices and levels of supply) in areas where the rainy season has been delayed or problematic, and in northern Nigeria.
- b. Rainfall trends in July are encouraging but the campaign has not yet caught up after the difficulties encountered at the start of the season. Indeed, the crucial period of fructification and ripening of cereals is also still to come. It is vital, therefore, that developments regarding crops, pasture land and even transhumance are monitored.
- c. Actions to prevent food insecurity are being undertaken. However, will the resources which Niger, Guinea Bissau and Mauritania currently have at their disposal be sufficient to respond to the needs of all communities affected? It is vital that information is obtained from the affected areas themselves.

▶▶ Information Sources

This analysis briefing is based on information supplied by a number of specialist institutions. For further detail, please refer to the following documents and websites:

CILSS-Info, 2006. Des prix de céréales en baisse par rapport à 2005 au Sahel (http://www.cilss.bf/info/article.php3?id_article=51&sq=com)

Fews Net/CILSS, 2006: Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest, juillet 2006, 6 p.

Fews Net/PAM, 2006. Niger : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, juillet 2006, 5 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Tchad : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, juillet 2006, 4 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Mauritanie : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, juillet 2006, 2 p.

Fews Net, 2006 : Understanding nutrition data and the causes of malnutrition in Niger, 22 p.

Fews Net, 2006: 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, 18 p

Fews Net, 2006: Executive overview of food security in Sub-Saharan Africa August 10, 2006, 2 p.

FAO, 2006 : Sahel weather and crop situation report, Report n° 3, 8 August 2006, 5 p.

WFP, 2006. Summary chart detailing confirmed contributions to Emergency Operations (EMOPs), 15 August 2006, 1 p.

Afrique Verte, 2006: Point sur la situation alimentaire au Sahel : Informations sur les prix des céréales : Burkina Faso – Mali – Niger. Suivi de la campagne n°64 : Point début août 2006, 5 p.

DGPASA, 2006: AgriAlerte : Alerte sur la situation de la campagne agricole des régions – Burkina Faso, n° 0000 – 18/08/2006, 1 p.

CSAO : www.oecd.org/sah
CILSS : www.cilss.bf et www.agrhymet.ne
Fews Net : www.fews.net
FAO : www.fao.org
PAM: www.wfp.org
Afrique Verte www.afriqueverte.org

►►► For a better understanding of food crises in the Sahel and West Africa

From 11 to 19 May 2006, a joint mission was carried out in Niger and Nigeria, in the Maradi, Katsina and Kano zones, to evaluate the cereal and livestock industries and markets. The mission included representatives from the CILSS, FEWS Net, the Sahel and West Africa Club, WAMISNET, UNICEF, OCHA and WFP.

Food security and cross-border trade in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi zone (K²M), Joint mission report, 2006 (English version to be available shortly)

Download the final version of the report found on the website:
<http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001083.pdf>

Several documents have been produced by Fews Net on understanding food security and nutrition and taking into account nutritional data in the early warning systems. The following documents can 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>