

Food Security Information Note FOSIN

Food Situation in the Sahel and West Africa: Should satisfactory agricultural and food prospects be expected?

Note 13 – September 2007

1. General overview of the rainfall and agricultural situation in the Sahel and West Africa

Seasonal forecasts for West Africa by the African Center of Meteorological Applications for Development – ACMAD have been confirmed. After a late start to the agricultural season in mid-July accompanied by irregular rains, rainfall was intense throughout the region during August and September. Most Sahelian countries received this long-awaited rainfall except Cape Verde where pockets of drought were registered in some areas. Significant flooding affected several countries in the Sahel and West Africa due to the increase in rainfall during these last two months. Some countries such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo have been particularly affected by the magnitude of this disaster which has led to the loss of human lives, goods (cattle, granaries) and infrastructure (bridges, roads, dikes). Evaluation of the impact is currently underway.

Besides these waves of flooding, the agricultural situation is generally satisfactory throughout the Sahel and West Africa. Pasturelands are also rejuvenating and watering points for animals are also being re-supplied.

2. An overall satisfactory food situation

At the end of this lean season the food situation seems on the whole satisfactory throughout the Sahel. Agricultural product markets remain well-supplied. Prices are stable and there is even a overall drop in price trends except in some areas of Mauritania and Senegal where basic consumer needs are met by imports. This satisfactory food situation is due to the positive outlook of the agricultural season and to the mitigating actions undertaken by the States and their partners coupled with the appearance of some recently harvested products such as fresh corn and groundnuts, etc. on the market

However, there are still some pockets of food insecurity in the Sahel. For example, in Mauritania corroborating analyses of FEWS Net and the World Food Program (WFP) estimate that approximately 400 000 people are currently in a food insecurity situation of which 170 000 are facing severe food insecurity. Mainly affected are farming households and poor small livestock breeders in agro-pastoral zones, rain-fed agriculture, the Senegal River Valley and transhumant areas. Mitigating actions are being undertaken in these zones.

3. What are the agricultural and food prospects?

3.1 Hope for a good agricultural season

Currently, the outlook for the agricultural and food season is positive:

- a. Fears and incertitude at the beginning of the rainy season have since dissipated with satisfactory rainfall registered throughout the region during August and September.
- b. **Flooding caused agricultural damage yet it has not significantly compromised agricultural production. However, satisfactory quantities of water reserves will benefit off-season crops (sorghum, rice, corn and market-gardening which, in some countries such as Mauritania, represents half of total cereal production.**

Thus, provisional forecasts set out at the regional meeting of agricultural and food perspectives in the Sahel and West Africa (held in Banjul, the Gambia from 17 to 19 September 2007) indicate that expected cereal harvests for the nine Sahel countries (CILSS), is between **14.7 million tonnes** for a *pessimistic scenario with an end to the rains by 30 September 2007* and **16.7 million tonnes** – *if rains continue until mid-October 2007*. In **Benin, Guinea, Nigeria and Togo**, despite flooding, cereal production prospects should also be good. They could reach a production level of between **26.6 million tonnes** – *pessimistic hypothesis* and **29.4 million tonnes** – *optimistic hypothesis*.



Agricultural and food perspectives remain *linked to rainfall activity at the end of the rainy season*. More particularly, rain continuing at least until mid-October could be a serious determining factor. Such a scenario would enable the mitigation of harmful affects linked to the late arrival of the season. This would particularly provide favourable conditions enabling most of the staple food crops to complete their cycle despite late seeding.

For cash crops such as cotton, the situation is nevertheless different. In Mali, preliminary observations indicate a 38% drop in cereal-sown areas compared to last year's campaign.

3.2. But the material and human devastation caused by flooding requires urgent measures and actions

Even if agricultural and food perspectives are overall satisfactory, floods affecting vulnerable areas in the Sahel and West Africa must still be taken into account. Agricultural damage could be worrisome with regard to the food situation of populations at-risk even if satisfactory agricultural prospects have been confirmed. In Burkina Faso, preliminary estimates indicate that approximately 22 000 hectares of crops have been destroyed by the floods of which a large part is located in the vulnerable regions of the north, north-centre and the Sahel.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that close to 500 000 people have been affected of which 260 000 are in Ghana, 111 700 in Togo and 40 637 in Burkina Faso. Several countries such as






Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo have already launched an appeal for international aid and several actions are currently underway to address this situation. This multi- and bilateral donor assistance is combined with the efforts undertaken by the flood-affected countries and regional economic organisations in West Africa, such is the case of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

Thus, it is crucial to already envisage the following measures for all of the affected countries in the Sahel and West Africa:

- a. An **evaluation of the extent of the agricultural damage in the vulnerable zones and their impact on food** for populations at-risk.
- b. Availability and access to seeds in flooded zones in order to plant off-season crops.
- c. **The implementation of strengthened food and nutritional security plans to assist the populations at-risk**, in particular those: (i) affected by floods, (ii) having been victims of a late and difficult start to the rainy season, (iii) where internal conflict has hindered their access to land and factors needed for agricultural production in conflict zones in eastern Chad. These security and strengthening plans for the food and nutritional situation could combine both actions aimed at dry season agricultural recession crop production but also income generating activities to improve the accessibility of these communities to food resources.

Information Sources

This FCPN analytical note was produced on the basis of information or analyses provided by various specialised Network (non) member institutions. More information can be obtained from the respective websites.

				
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Afrique Verte: www.afriqueverte.org, Reliefweb: www.reliefweb.int/
 OCHA: www.humanitarianinfo.org & <http://ochaonline.un.org/>; SISA/CNSA: www.sisabf.net

Better Access to Information on the Food and Nutritional Situation in the Sahel and West Africa

The FCPN has set up a website to encourage access to information on the food and nutritional situation in the region in view of decision-making for action.

For any information questions, and/or analytical document you may need with regard to the food and nutritional situation, please access the site at: www.food-security.net.

For a Better Understanding of the Market's Role in Food and Nutritional Security in the Sahel and West Africa

In order to better understand the market's importance in food security, FEWS NET has published an analytical note based on the food crisis in Niger in 2005.

For more information, see the article via the link: <http://www.fews.net/resources/gcontent/pdf/1001398.pdf>

Following the joint initiative CILSS, FEWS Net, Sahel and West Africa Club, UNICEF, UNOCHA, WAMIS-net and WFP on "Food Security and Border Trade in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi - K²M zone", launched in May 2006, a regional actors workshop was held from 17 to 20 September 2007 in Katsina, Nigeria.

One of the key objectives of this workshop was to define operational actions to carry out in the short-term to prevent and manage food crises at the local level and implement projects through cross-border cooperation.

More information can be obtained via the link: http://www.afriquefrontieres.org/images/pdf/edito/fr/programme_katsina_eng.pdf