Réseau de Prévention des Crises Alimentaire (RPCA)
Food Crises Prevention Network (FCPN) (www.food-security.net)

Food Security Information Note - FOSIN

Food Situation in the Sahel and West Africa: *Better Functioning of Staple Food Crop Markets is Urgently Needed*

1. Tensions remain on staple food crop markets with consequences on food and nutritional security.

This year, as already set out in the February 2008 FOSIN (FOSIN 17), staple food crop markets should function well if there is to be food and nutritional security in the Sahel and West Africa. These markets are one of the key issues for several reasons, some of which are:

a. Low production recorded in high cereal supplying zones in northern Nigeria and Ghana;

b. The drop in cereal production in Sahelian and coastal West African countries as compared to last year. Table 1 indicates the extent of this drop.

Table 1: Gross Cereal Production in West Africa

Country/ Region	2006-2007 Campaign	2007-2008 Campaign	Difference
CILSS countries	15 032 000	14 764 000	-2%
Coastal countries (excluding Liberia	34 741 000	32 462 000	-7%
Countries with decreased production	Benin, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal		

c. The accumulated effect of flooding and early termination of rains at the end of the wintering season has greatly strengthened traders' retention of stocks;

d. The sharp rise in international prices of agricultural products has also affected West African staple food product markets. Most-affected countries are net importers such as Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal which greatly depend on the international market, notably for wheat and rice.

In order to deal with this situation, some countries are trying to limit the rise in prices by waiving taxes and customs duties, selling staple food crops at subsidised prices, etc. However these measures are still insufficient and provide only local solutions. Market tensions remain.

There is an overall trend in rising prices with the exception of Burkina Faso and Mali where prices stabilised at the beginning of March 2008 due to the actions undertaken by government authorities and NGOs. In Niger, for example, competition between Nigerian and Ghanaian merchants to provide cereals (millet, sorghum) and cowpeas to markets seems to encourage prices spiralling upward. This rise is estimated at 23% for sorghum in Tillabéri, 20% for millet in Zinder and 18% for corn in Agadez.

Generally, the current situation in the region compared to last year is as follows:

- In the eastern basin (Benin, Chad, Niger, Nigeria) there is a serious cereal deficit in northern Nigeria due to strong agro-food industry demand (cattle feed, brewing). This sharp rise in prices has begun to affect access to food particularly in Niger and Nigeria;
- In the centre basin (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo), prices of dry cereals remains stable overall. However, rice prices have risen significantly;
- In the western basin (Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal), prices of dry cereals have increased moderately while imported commodity prices have risen sharply. For these rice and wheat import-dependent countries, supply and access difficulties already threaten food security of the poorest households in isolated zones.

In **conclusion**, the market situation is troubling in some areas of Niger (east and north), the Gambia, the extreme north of Nigeria, northeast Guinea Bissau, southeast Mauritania, Senegal and Cape Verde. Urban centres and structurally deficient zones are also affected. Similarly, the already worrying nutritional situation, notably for children under 5 years of age, women breast-feeding and pregnant, should be monitored closely.

2. Improving market fluidity: appropriate responses urgently needed!

A slight drop in cereal production was recorded in 2007-08 compared to the 2006-07 agricultural campaign. This follows two consecutive years of satisfactory production which, in principle, has enabled producers, merchants and government officials of some countries to reconstitute their stocks. Although stock levels are not precisely known, many market actors estimate that some producers in Nigeria and wholesalers in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria have significant stocks that once released could greatly reduce market tensions.

Already government action, notably cereal sales at subsidised prices, seems to have visible effects although they remain localised. For example, in March 2008 Nigeria decided to place its strategic cereal reserve stock on the market (sold at half the market price)? Thus, will governments continue to undertake these broadening and strengthening measures which will broaden the impact of improved market supply? How can better regional coordination of these country-developed initiatives be assured in order to have an impact on regional markets? Would broadening such measures lead to the release of stocks, getting away from the tendency to retain stocks and thus assuring better market supply during the lean period?

For the moment, nothing is sure. The response to these questions will depend on stock availability and their placement on the regional and international markets. It is likely that:

- In many of the countries, institutional (national food security stocks, intervention stocks, etc.) and community crop stocks, although relatively significant given two consecutive satisfactory agricultural production campaigns, will be unable to respond to effects as a result of the international increase in cereal prices.
- The international rise in prices continues to be significant in particular for some countries greatly dependent on the international market notably for rice and wheat. Significant improvement of the regional market through the release of cereal stocks will have considerable impact.

3. What to do?

The food situation is precarious due to current tensions on some markets and some commodities. The situation could be exacerbated if actions already underway or recommended to assure better vulnerable populations' access to staple food crops, notably during the next lean period, prove to be ineffective.

With regard to the market and more precisely the role that regional economic organisations should play, several recommendations were put forward at the 23rd annual RPCA meeting held in November 2007 (see: RPCA Policy Note). These measures are still relevant and should be **put into action now**!

Thus, keeping all of this in mind, the following is essential:

- **a.** Regional coordination at the decision-making level with regional economic organisations and West African countries to decide on measures and concrete actions notably concerning synergising action in order to deal with the rise in staple food product prices.
- **b.** Assure fluidity and free movement of food commodities between deficient and surplus zones in countries and the sub-region.
- **c.** Facilitate cereal and food product imports in order to assure better market supply and avoid all speculation.
- **d.** Avoid disseminating global and overly alarmist information on the imminence of a widespread food crisis.
- **e.** Carry out more targeted evaluations in the most vulnerable zones to determine most appropriate interventions for vulnerable populations.
- **f.** Promote targeted emergency actions in response to the nutritional situation, in particular strengthening preventative actions and treating children with less than 5 years of age and pregnant and breast-feeding women suffering from malnutrition in the most vulnerable zones.

››› Sources d'information

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.

CSAO SWAC	FEWS NET	CILSS	FAO	WFP
www.westafricaclub.org	www.fews.net	www.cilss.bf	www.fao.org	www.wfp.org
✉: sibirijean.zoundi@oecd.org ☎+33 1 45 24 19 82	✉: ssow@fews.net ☎+226 50 37 47 06	✉: amadou.konate@cilss.bf ☎+226 50 37 41 25/33	✉: henri.josserand@fao.org ☎+39 06 57 05 30 99	✉: mamadou.diouf@wfp.org ☎
✉: leonidas.hitimana@oecd.org ☎+33 1 45 24 17 98	✉: librahim@fews.net ☎+227 96 97 70 11	✉: moussa.cisse@cilss.bf ☎+226 50 37 41 25/33		
		✉: b.sidibe@aghrymet.ne ☎+227 20 31 53 16		

Afrique Verte www.afriqueverte.org, Reliefweb: www.reliefweb.int/
OCHA: www.humanitarianinfo.org & http://ochaonline.un.org/; SISA/CNSA: www.sisa.bf

››› 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.