

Food Security Information Note - FOSIN

Food Situation in the Sahel and West Africa:

Could a forecasted satisfactory rainy season ease the hike in food commodity prices during the upcoming 2008 lean period?

Note 21 – June 2008

1. Favourable outlook for July-August-September for the 2008-09 agricultural season

Favourable climate agro-meteorological conditions were forecasted by ACMAD¹ for the beginning of the 2008-09 agricultural campaign for the Sahel and West Africa. If these climatic forecasts hold forth, the 2008 there should be a normal to above-normal rainy season in the CILSS zone.

Thus, productivity simulations on 31 May 2008 based on PRESAO (*Prévision Saisonnières en Afrique de l'Ouest*) indicate provisional crop yields equivalent to above normal compared to the 1971-2000 period in CILSS countries. Rainfall activity should be the same or close to that of 1999 which was considered a year with satisfactory rainfall.

However, there still could be flooding as was experienced during the 2007-08 campaign.

The locust situation remains calm throughout the region, although some measures have been undertaken in the north west of Mauritania to combat minor infestations. The situation in northern Mali and Niger has not been addressed due to ongoing armed conflicts. Increased surveillance using remote detection tools is needed during the agricultural season.

2. Can an expected satisfactory rainy season help reduce prices during the lean period?

Such a situation would be greatly desirable especially in an international context with rising agricultural and food product prices. However, this would entail several parameters, among which are:

- a. *The overall situation of the agricultural campaign:* fields must be prepared and sowed in the Sudan zones in Sahel and coastal countries for the main season. In some areas of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger), rainfall was slightly below normal in April – May 2008 compared to that of 1971-2000 and 2007. However, it is too early to announce the beginning of the agricultural campaign as the season normally begins between June and July.
- b. *Maintaining and strengthening country-implemented mitigating measures.* Currently, the food situation remains overall satisfactory even in a context of high prices especially for food commodities. This situation is due to the three previous years of satisfactory cereal production and the impact of mitigating measures. However, maximum price levels are usually reached during the lean period, even with good agricultural production. Already, analyses carried out at the beginning of June indicate traditional price stability and continued increasing rice prices across all markets. Imported and local rice are reaching record prices. Thus, the major challenge remains State's capacity, in collaboration with key actors (civil society organisations, development and private partners, etc.), to maintain and strengthen emergency actions geared towards assisting the most vulnerable populations.
- c. *Expected flooding could exacerbate the situation for vulnerable populations and tensions could remain with regard to accessibility.* Flooding during the 2007-08 agricultural campaign indicates that these catastrophic situations require targeted and appropriate food and humanitarian aid. The 2008 lean period comes at a time in which food commodity prices are high and several measures and tools are being implemented to encourage local agricultural production. It is vital and urgent to strengthening populations' production capacities (seeds,

¹ African Center of Meteorological Applications for Development - ACMAD



farming equipment and inputs) in zones subject to flooding.

In summary: Although it is currently too early to speculate on the overall start of the 2008-09 agricultural campaign, a late or difficult start to the rainy season will severely aggravate food tensions as well as prices. Similarly, expected flooding could make accessibility to food more complex and difficult for vulnerable populations and will require targeted and appropriate emergency actions.

3. What should be done?

Political decision-makers and all actors should step up their vigilance during the 2008-09 wintering season. Thus, joint actions should be undertaken:

- a. *Create conditions for a successful 2008-09 agricultural campaign.* Expected satisfactory rainfall is not enough to encourage agricultural production which needs to be accompanied by appropriate support measures. Several States have already announced support measures. They involve, among others: (i) strengthening access by agricultural producers to agricultural inputs;


(ii) facilitating access to agricultural producers to agricultural advice, credits, etc.

- b. *Strengthening mitigating measures* already implemented through various tools including social safety nets, management short-term supply, as well as measures to mitigate price increases, etc.
- c. *Assuring better monitoring of evolving prices and the nutritional situation.* This monitoring should be strengthened in most of the countries to facilitate quick decision making.
- d. *Preparing for possible flood management.* Lessons should be learned from flooding experienced in the region during the 2007-08 campaign with regard to evaluating impacts and providing responses during the current campaign.

In conclusion: There should be increased vigilance during the start of the agricultural campaign. Difficulties could lead to an increase in food tensions during the lean period. Flooding during this 2008 rainy season should also be taken into account in the responses to crises and those in support of the most vulnerable populations. At the same time, management of the 2008 lean period requires strengthening mitigating actions and measures to be implemented by countries.

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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Better understanding of the markets, prices and food security prospects 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.