



4th select Meeting of the Food Crises Prevention Network (FCPN) in the Sahel and in West Africa

Paris (OCDE Headquarters) 17 April 2009

The high level of food prices in the Sahel and in West Africa could be a threat to food security.

The 2008-2009 cropping season in West Africa and in Chad witnessed a cereal production estimated at 56 378 000 tonnes which reflected a rise by 17% when compared to the 2007-2008 cropping season. Cereal production in the CILSS countries estimated at 17 850 000 T has risen by 31% relative to 2007 and by 30% when compared to the average of the past five years. Following the good rains and measures taken by several countries, rice production significantly increased stretching from 1 853 000 T in 2007 to 2 650 000 T in 2008 for the entire CILSS countries. Exceptional productions were also recorded for the other crops like tubers and cow pea. It should be noted that the results of the agricultural sample surveys in most of the countries is still to be confirmed.

Despite the good agricultural production, it has been observed in Senegal, in Mauritania, in Niger, in Ivory Coast, in Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso, Togo and in Cape Verde that there are some localized pockets of risk zones.

As from March 2009, the rise in the price of cereals started fading in most of the markets but these prices were still above the average of the preceding five years (15 to 46%) despite the drops in price that were observed in several markets and the normalization of the trade flows between the surplus zones and the deficit zones.

Furthermore, as a result of the high prices, the governments, the private operators and the village communities experiencing deficits could not reconstitute the desired food security stocks. With the approach of the lean period, it is possible that the rise in price will last a long time to come. Owing to this fact, the high prices will continue to be a threat to the food security of the households that depend on the markets such as the low income urban households, the rural households experiencing depleted security stocks and the livestock breeders particularly in the North-East of Nigeria, in the East of Niger and those inhabiting the pastoral zones of Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania.

The international financial and economic crisis is another factor that aggravates the vulnerability of the poorest populace within a context marked by high prices for essential items. The possible reduction of cash transfers from immigrants, rising unemployment and the drop in the price of agricultural export products following the international economic crisis are potential risks for the food security of the households particularly at the approach of the lean period.

Despite a slight improvement in most countries in the course of the past three years, the nutritional situation could deteriorate in the coming months as a result of access difficulties.

In order to face this situation, it is imperative to ensure a smooth food supply to the structurally deficit zones. At the same time, access to food for the under privileged populace in both the rural and urban areas should be encouraged through supply management and market regulation instruments in order to boost the income of the populace. On the basis of the foregoing, the regional System on Prevention and Management of Food Crises (PREGEC) must strengthen the regional surveillance System.

It is therefore important to : (i) promote and improve local products and take account of the regional dimension in the management of food security by the countries ; (ii) carry out studies on the impact of the measures taken by the Governments in facing price increases ; (iii) pursue the measures aimed at boosting agricultural production and revenue generating activities (iv) accelerate the process directed at rebuilding national and community stocks where possible and to use the stocks already mobilized prudently ; (iv) improve upon the monitoring of the markets and the trade flows so as to avoid any lapse likely to cause a crisis during the lean period. It is also important to improve the actions on surveillance as well as the nutritional aspects during the lean period.

The Network on prevention of food crises (FCPN) recommends :

- o The lifting of the obstacles to the free circulation of foodstuffs in the West African and Sahelian sub-space.
- o The continuation of the aid programs for the most vulnerable populace in the rural, peri-urban and urban zones in order to limit the degradation of their purchasing power as well as a subsequent degradation of malnutrition.
- o The improvement of price monitoring activities on foodstuffs on the markets and the beefing up of supplies particularly in the structurally deficit areas.

The RPCA stressed on the importance of the reliability of information as a vital ingredient in decision making. In this regard, the participants passed a strong recommendation to the countries to put in place some sustainable and effective investment mechanisms in areas pertaining to agricultural statistics and the systems on the prevention of food crises.

Done in Paris, 17 April 2009

The FCPN