ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SAHELIAN FOOD CRISIS PREVENTION NETWORK

MINUTES

Bamako (Mali), 21 November 2000

Document drafted in collaboration with the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS).

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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SAHELIAN FOOD CRISIS PREVENTION NETWORK

Bamako (Mali), 21 November 2000

The 15th meeting of the Sahelian Food Crisis Prevention Network was held in Bamako, Mali, on Tuesday, 21 November 2000, to review the monitoring of the agricultural and food situation in the Sahel. The meeting was jointly organised and financed by the Club du Sahel Secretariat and the CILSS, through the regional programme for the prevention and management of food crises in the Sahel (PREGEC). It was attended by the members of the network — experts and senior staff from sub-regional and international institutions and organisations and NGOs, notably the Club du Sahel Secretariat, the CILSS, the WFP, FAO, USAID, CIDA and other donors, including the European Union, France and Italy. See the list of participants in the annex.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr Alhassane Adama Diallo, director-general of the AGRHYMET/CILSS regional centre, and Mr Michel Leblanc, administrator of the Club du Sahel Secretariat.

After the participants adopted the agenda, the proceedings focused on the following points:

- The results of the 1999/2000 cropping season,
- The forecast food situation for the 2000/2001 cropping season,
- The food situation in West Africa,
- The future of the Food Crisis Prevention Network.

After the presentations, debates and discussions, the participants reached the following main conclusions:

1. **RESULTS OF THE 1999/2000 CROPPING SEASON**

The final results of the agricultural survey of the 1999/2000 cropping season were published in all the countries. Gross grain production in the CILSS countries was 11,212,400 tonnes, 2% higher than the forecasts made in October 1999. This figure represents a 4% increase on production in the 1998/1999 season (10,745,700 t) and a 19% increase on average production for 1994-1998 (9,449,000 t). Gross production per capita was 207 kg. This is around 2% higher than the 1998 figure and around 9% higher than the average of the previous five years (190 kg).
Net grain production is estimated at 9,150,500 t for needs estimated at 11,397,600 t, i.e. an 80% coverage rate, compared with 79% in the 1998/99 season.

Residual stocks decreased from 781,500 t on 1 November 1999 to around 713,800 t at the end of October 2000. Producer stocks, consisting mainly of dry grain, rose from 332,600 t on 1 November 1999 to 376,000 t on 31 October 2000. Most countries were able to rebuild their stocks. Total imports were estimated at 1,929,700 t, breaking down as 1,794,200 t of commercial imports and 135,500 t of food aid. Commercial imports exceeded forecasts by 11%, and food aid attained only 88% of forecasts. The total grain availability for the year was 11,861,700 t, an increase of 4% on 1998/99. Apparent consumption was 11,095,300 t. Regarding the accessibility of grain on the markets, the year was characterised by fairly regular supply of markets, which was reflected in stable prices, lower than the previous year. On the whole, the food situation was satisfactory, except in some parts of Cape Verde, Mauritania and Chad. In these regions, intervention by the region’s partners alleviated population groups’ vulnerability to food insecurity.

2. **FORECAST FOOD SITUATION FOR 2000/2001**

2.1 **Description of the 1999/2000 cropping season**

The rainy season in 2000 consisted of two phases. In the first phase, lasting until early August, conditions were generally favourable to crop growth. There were no problems of seed availability after the above-average or record harvests of 1999. After sowing, rainfall was regular on the whole and evenly distributed over June and July. The second phase of the rainy season, from early or mid-August depending on the country, was marked by bad agro-climatic conditions. Long periods without rainfall were recorded, particularly in the eastern half of Burkina Faso, in Niger (particularly in the départements of Tillabery, Tahoua and Diffa) and in Chad. Crops suffered hydric stress as a result of this decrease in rainfall. The rains partly returned in September. Significant late rain was recorded in the Gambia, Mauritania and Senegal in October.

On the whole, attacks by insect pests were limited, except in Niger and Chad, where infestations of locusts and borers were reported.

Regarding the pastoral situation, the rains regenerated pastures in the west of the Sahel and in Sudan. In contrast, in the east and centre of the Sahel pastures are scanty, which will make it difficult to feed cattle in these areas.

With respect to water, flows in the permanent watercourses were lower than last season. Flows in the temporary watercourses were also low or nil, particularly in the Sahelian region. The levels of reservoirs, lakes and waterholes in the east and centre of the Sahel are low. It will be difficult to grow dry-season crops and water cattle in these regions.

2.2 **Forecast grain harvest**

Grain production for the 2000/2001 cropping season is forecast at 9,454,000 t. This is 16% lower than the previous season (11,212,400 t) and 2% lower than the average of the previous five years. It will therefore be an average harvest, but well below the record of 1999. The main producer countries in the Sahel are Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, which account for over three-quarters of Sahelian production, followed by Senegal and Chad. Almost three-quarters of production consists of millet (46%) and sorghum (28%). Rice accounts for 15% and maize 9%, with wheat, fonio or berbére making up the remainder. Production is expected to be lower than the five-year average in Burkina Faso and Chad, close to the average in Mali, Mauritania and Niger and higher than the average in Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal.
2.3 **Forecast food situation in grain**

The region’s total grain needs will be close to 11,443,200 t, compared with grain availability of 10,513,200 t. The forecast grain balance shows a net deficit of around 930,200 t and apparent availability of 189.6 kg of grain per capita. The deficit will be unevenly distributed between the countries. The deficit will represent 4% of human consumption needs in Burkina Faso, 29.5% in Cape Verde, 0.7% in the Gambia, 6.5% in Guinea-Bissau, 7% in Mali, 18.4% in Mauritania, 6.6% in Niger, 9% in Senegal and 31% in Chad. If actual harvests, imports and stocks are in line with forecasts, a substantial effort will be required to make up the deficits in Chad, Cape Verde and Mauritania. In the other countries, a slight revision in import and stocking programmes will be sufficient to make up the total deficit, because there is less of a gap between apparent availability and consumption needs. However, although it may be relatively easy to make up the national deficit in these countries, localised deficits may require more effort if the population groups concerned have a low capacity to adjust. This could be the case this year, because many structurally deficit areas are still affected by the decline in production. This is especially likely in Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso. The lack of water and pasture will also contribute to food crises in livestock-breeding areas in these countries.

These factors suggest that the grain markets will be unstable this year and prices significantly higher than last season, particularly in Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania. We can expect moderate price rises in Mali and relatively stable prices in Senegal and the Gambia if supplies are regular. In Cape Verde, the regulation of prices currently underway will avert shocks on the markets.

After comments and discussions, the network concluded that these forecasts indicated that there would be more food difficulties than in 1999/2000 for vulnerable population groups in Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. While awaiting a precise estimate of their numbers and potential aid needs, the participants recommended the following preventive actions:

- Identifying the vulnerable population groups and assessing potential aid needs in the cyclically and structurally deficit areas. In the countries where the early warning systems are not operational, joint CILSS/FEWS/WFP missions could be conducted for this purpose on the request of the governments.
- Encouraging the transfer of grain from surplus areas to deficit areas by informing traders of the deficit areas and by facilitating their access to the necessary financing and logistics.
- Preferring local purchases in food aid operations.
- Assisting farmers’ organisations to supply grain banks (by facilitating credit and contact between organisations).
- Developing dry-season cropping in the areas where water is available.
- Improving monitoring of the food situation in the countries by tracking prices, market supply and changes in people’s living conditions in areas at risk.

The participants also raised questions about:

- the discrepancy between the harvest forecast figures presented at the Praia meeting (September 2000) and those communicated at this meeting,
- mapping areas at risk,
- the reliability of the data collected,
- deliveries of food aid,
- assessing food crisis prevention and management mechanisms and activities, particularly the PREGEC.

Regarding the discrepancy with the figures presented at the Praia meeting (September 2000), the PREGEC explained that the figures provided in September 2000 were estimates based on qualitative observations, while those communicated at the network’s meetings are derived from objective surveys (the agricultural survey).

On the issue of mapping, the AGRHYMET centre was asked to produce thematic maps to highlight the areas at risk.

Regarding the reliability of the data, the network noted a deterioration in the data collected by the agricultural survey since the end of DIAPER. This is mainly due to inadequate technical and financial resources. The network called on the countries and partners to assist data collection mechanisms.

The food aid balance was not established, because of a lack of detailed data. The balance will be calculated at the PREGEC’s next meetings. The participants expressed their concern about the low levels of national food security stocks in Chad and Niger, which deprive these two landlocked countries of the necessary resources for rapid intervention in the event of a serious crisis.

Regarding the PREGEC, the unit has endeavoured over the year to organise and run the regional tracking system. The countries, NGOs and partners have adhered to its objectives. In the coming season, the unit will work on methodological aspects of assessment of vulnerability in concert with all the actors.

With a view to enhancing coordination and synergy, the participants asked the actors from the national and international systems (CILSS, WFP, FEWS, FAO) that monitor the agricultural and food situation in the Sahel to:

♦ reactivate the steering group on determining vulnerability to facilitate exchanges of experience between the members of the network and harmonise identification and analysis of vulnerable areas;

♦ take initiatives to encourage permanent circulation of information outside periods of consultation both within the network and between the network and information systems.

3. FOOD SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA

Given the climatic conditions, the situation in West Africa is good. Northern Nigeria could supply Niger. The situation will be difficult in Sierra Leone, Liberia (figures difficult to obtain in this country) and in the Great Lakes region because of the permanent conflict there.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NETWORK’S MISSION AND COMPOSITION OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY FROM A POVERTY-REDUCTION PERSPECTIVE

This point was presented as an informative note, based on the proposals formulated in the strategic framework, and more generally, on the Sahel 21 vision of the changes required to the network’s composition and mission.
The participants examined this point with the main objective of preparing the network’s future after the 2nd Forum of Sahelian Societies adopted the strategic framework for sustainable food security from a poverty-reduction perspective.

After the discussions, the participants suggested continuing the basic activities conducted since the network was launched:

- cyclical monitoring of the agricultural and food situation in the Sahel;
- consultation and coordination between national, regional and international partners on these issues.

The participants also expressed the wish to extend the analysis of food situations to the other dimensions of food security. This analysis is currently focused on availability. It would be appropriate to consider the other aspects — stability and accessibility. This change could be provided for by broadening the Food Aid Charter to a food security charter or, at least — to avoid the long and complex process of discussing a new charter — by adding to the existing charter a perspective document that takes a broader view of approaches to food security and related instruments. Some participants stressed the need to improve assessment and self-evaluation of practices by the various actors, which was more frequent in previous years, particularly the annual assessment of the Food Aid Charter, an exercise that hasn’t been conducted for several years. This would make it possible to draw attention to interventions that deviate from the charter’s principles and possibly to reshape future programmes.

In reaction to several aid agencies’ loss of interest in active participation in the network over the past few years, the participants reminded them of the importance of food security issues, even if they are no longer as “topical”. Other donors that operate in the Sahel could also be invited to participate more actively in the network’s activities, either directly or through the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, to which the Club du Sahel is attached. In addition, the network should include national policymakers from the Sahel to ensure that the concerns of the Sahelian actors (in charge of national food security systems, platforms in civil society, NGOs) are fully taken into account.

At the end of the meeting, the network presented its opinion on the agricultural and food situation 2000/2001 to the Council of Ministers of the CILSS member countries.

Bamako, 21 November 2000

The Participants
### Meeting of the Sahelian Food Crisis Prevention Network
Bamako (Mali), 21 November 2000

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