



COMMUNIQUÉ on the 2017-18 agricultural outlook and food prospects for the Sahel and West Africa

Regional technical consultation

REGIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF FOOD CRISES (PREGEC)

“The outlook for the 2017-18 agro-pastoral campaign bodes well for the region with average to good crop production expected.”

The September PREGEC meeting conducted a half-term assessment of the 2017-18 agricultural campaign and monitored actions conducted since March.

The meeting was organised by the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and its partners.

Members of PREGEC met in Conakry to discuss the progress of this year's agro-pastoral campaign, the agricultural outlook and the food situation. They made the following declaration:

- 1.** In preparation for the campaign, governments and their partners made significant strides in helping farmers and pastoralists obtain agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers and pesticides) and veterinary materials (vaccines). In addition, food and humanitarian assistance measures have been implemented for vulnerable populations.
- 2.** In terms of rainfall, a surplus-to-normal situation prevailed in the CILSS/ECOWAS zone until 31 August 2017. Heavy rains caused flooding and resulted in several deaths (particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Sierra Leone) as well as crop losses and extensive damage to infrastructure (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Niger and Sierra Leone). Pockets of water shortages were observed in the first half of the season, particularly in parts of southern Burkina Faso, northeastern Chad, northern Ghana, central and western Mali, in the agro-pastoral areas of Mauritania, central Nigeria and northern Senegal. The September outlook forecasts above average rainfall (compared to the 1981-2010 period) in western and central parts of the Sahel. A shortage of rainfall is expected in the Gulf of Guinea countries (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo), Burkina Faso, Chad and southwestern Niger.
- 3.** In terms of hydrological conditions, as of 31 August 2017, river flows were, overall, above average (compared to the 1981-2010 period), but remained lower than the previous year. A normal situation is observed in the upper parts of the Niger River basin and a surplus in the middle and lower parts. A surplus has also been observed at all of the Lake Chad basin's stations. Losses were recorded for the Senegal River basin at Bakel and a surplus-to-normal situation was observed at Falémé and Bafing Makana. As of September 2017, there is a significant risk that the Sudano-Sahelian rivers might overflow, especially in areas already susceptible to flooding (Benin, Mali, Niger and Nigeria).
- 4.** In terms of the agricultural conditions, the cropping season got off to an overall early start in the eastern and central parts of the region, and a normal to slightly early start in the western areas. In fact, planting of the main rainfed crops was carried out by the end of June in the central and eastern areas of the CILSS/ECOWAS zone. In certain western areas, planting continued until early August (for rainfed rice, cowpeas, sesame and watermelon). The crop water requirements were generally favourable for crop development during the season. As of 31 August 2017, crop development ranged from the flowering stage to full maturity, depending on the date of planting. In areas where planting was delayed, crops are predominantly in the seed setting and heading stages.

5 The phytosanitary situation has been uneventful so far except in areas where army worm attacks have necessitated rapid interventions by governments and their partners, in particular in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Togo. The presence of grain-eating birds could, in future, pose a threat to millet and rice crops in Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria.

6 Considering the above, the region's overall 2017-18 harvests could be average to good. Grain harvests could be between 66 and 73 million tonnes, representing a -1.4% to 8% variation over the previous year and between 9-20% compared to the five-year average. Root and tuber crops are estimated to be between 166 and 171 million tonnes, an increase of 0.05-3% over the previous year and an increase of 3-9% compared to the five-year average (2012-16). An above average increase is expected for legumes including cowpeas and groundnuts.

7 The pastoral situation is generally good in the region with good availability of fodder and surface water for livestock. However, there are areas at risk of pasture shortages in the extreme northeast of Chad, in the pastoral areas of Niger, in northern Senegal and in the agro-pastoral areas of Mauritania.

8 Markets have been generally well stocked during the 2017 lean period except in the Lake Chad basin where civil unrest continues to disrupt the flow of goods. Overall demand has grown despite government and partner-sponsored food assistance efforts. As a result, grain prices increased significantly compared to the five-year average, mainly for millet and sorghum. Larger increases (more than 20% compared to the five-year average) were recorded for corn in Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Sierra Leone and especially in Nigeria, where, in addition to the civil insecurity in the northeastern part of the country, depreciation of the Naira has affected consumer prices. Prices for tubers and cash crops are generally up. Livestock prices are also up compared to the five-year average in western and central areas, but are falling in Chad and Niger where markets are still disrupted by civil insecurity in the Lake Chad area and the depreciation of the Naira. Given the significant increase in grain prices, the terms of trade for livestock/ grains and cash crops/grains are generally unfavourable to livestock producers and cash crop producers. Considering the overall satisfactory outlook for production and the favourable international trade environment, a seasonal decline in agricultural commodity prices is expected from October.

9 In general, the food situation improves when harvests become available - first season harvests in coastal countries and early harvests in the Sahel. In addition, there are various food assistance interventions (grain sales at reduced prices, free distribution, cash transfers, etc.) that governments and their partners implement to support vulnerable populations during the lean season. However, the persistence of civil unrest in the Lake Chad basin, in northern Mali and in the Liptako-Gourma area is a key threat to an already worrying food and nutrition security situation in the region.

10 Drawing on the discussions of the regional technical consultation, the participants made the following recommendations:

With respect to States and partners:

- Maintain and strengthen surveillance of the army worm in order to avoid the risk of propagation;
- Strengthen the ability to respond to phytosanitary problems and help plant protection services address the threats of grain-eating birds and other pests;
- Stay vigilant in flood-prone areas of the Niger and Senegal river basins to reduce the risk of flooding;
- Capitalise on favourable water conditions by providing substantial support to producers to intensify the production of irrigated crops;
- Closely monitor areas with weak grazing resources in northeastern Chad, northern Senegal, pastoral areas of Niger and agro-pastoral areas of Mauritania, in order to deliver appropriate responses if necessary;
- Maintain humanitarian, food and nutrition assistance in the Lake Chad basin and the Liptako-Gourma area.

With respect to CILSS:

- Continue training national experts on the use of satellite data in order to monitor the agro-pastoral campaign and the food balance sheet.

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