



The food situation in the Sahel: Is a second consecutive food crisis in Niger likely? What is the situation for the other Sahelian and West African countries?

Information Note 1 - July 2006

1. Brief background of the (2006-07) global agricultural and food situation in the Sahel

According to the analysis by different information sources (Agrhymet, Fews Net and the FAO), the farming season in the Sahel is gradually starting, with some local delays in rainfall, which do not appear worrisome for the time being. The general, ecological conditions seem unfavourable to desert locusts.

The situation in June 2006 indicates that cereal markets are generally stable with a price level significantly lower than that observed last year during the same period and close to the average of the past five years. The signs from the cereal markets confirm that the rainfall situation is not yet worrying despite the delays and the drought pockets observed in some places.

Prices observed on border markets in the coastal countries are still significantly low, compared to those in the Sahel. This trend constitutes a favourable condition for pursuing the importation of cereals into the Sahel from the coastal countries like Nigeria and Benin.

2. Food situation in Niger: Are these warning signs of a food crisis?

2.1 Food and nutritional situation

The assessment of the food and nutritional situation presented by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Fews Net indicates that the month of April 2006 was characterised by the persistence of localised food insecurity pockets in most regions of the country, as it was the case in 2005. The joint market monitoring carried out by WFP, MIS (Market Information System) and Fews Net, shows that prices are higher in vulnerable zones. Regarding cattle, a worrying sign is the abnormal presence of young female breeding cows on 23% of the markets monitored, i.e. in N'Guigmi, Kornaka, Mayahi, Gararé, Kaou, Kirtachi and Tillabéri. This shows a degradation of the food security of cattle herders in these zones and early decapitalisation.

The total cereal production announced by Niger is

3,737,000 tons, which is considered as a level of production in deficit.

As regards the global food situation, there is gradual depletion of family stock in some communes, notably Tanout, Olléléwa and Gouré. The latest situation presented by the Coordination Unit of the Early Warning System (CC/SAP), at its meeting on 20-21 June 2006, shows that the number of vulnerable zones has increased up to 134 (against 105 in November 2005). These zones comprise 2,425 villages with an overall population of 2,545,145 inhabitants. The food situation is particularly serious in the Gouré, Tanout, Boboye, Bouza and Mayahi departments.

Livelihood degradation for households in these vulnerable zones is confirmed by the results of the joint survey conducted by Early Warning System (EWS), WFP, Fews Net, the FAO and INS. These results show that 15% of households are facing severe food insecurity, while 15% are in a moderate food insecurity situation. **By extrapolating on the total population, this represents 1,779,456 people facing severe food insecurity and 2,091,649 people moderate food insecurity, accounting for 3,871,104 people.** The results show that households facing food insecurity are mostly those headed by women, widowers or widows.

At the nutritional level, the increase in admissions to nutritional recuperation centres, observed by many NGOs in March 2006, continued in April and this trend should be the same during the lean period. In June 2006, an average daily increase of 4% was indicated but this increase reflects a normal situation related to seasonal and cyclical variations.

However, the situation is not yet alarming. The following assessment was given in CC/SAP bulletin n°113:

- (i) No zone is facing an extremely critical food situation.
- (ii) 5 zones (Dankassari/Doutchi, North Aguié, Harikanassou/Boboye, Tombo-Koïrey/Dosso and Moe/Mirriah) are facing a critical food situation.
- (iii) One zone, Téra-Diagourou (Téra) is facing a very difficult food situation.
- (iv) Seven zones (East Daouché/Matameye, Dogonkirya/ Doutchi, Matankari/Doutchi,

North-East Gangara/Tanou, Garhanga/Keïta, Bosso/Diffa, North Ourafane/Tessaoua) are facing a difficult food situation.

- (v) 25 zones are facing a precarious situation with warning signs.

2.2 Factors requiring vigilance

The upcoming lean period may be difficult in the light of various factors including:

- a. The aftermath of the previous food crisis in 2005, which made families highly vulnerable financially and the reconstitution of food stocks difficult despite relatively good rains in 2005.
- b. Persistent structural poverty in vulnerable zones, which constitutes a major factor and an unavoidable indication of repeated food crises in Niger and most Sahelian countries.
- c. Limited availability of opportunities for income generation with off-season agricultural productions. This situation is due to the increasingly unfavourable climatic and hydrological conditions, thus aggravating the accessibility of households to food products.
- d. Persistent outbreak of meningitis epidemic, mainly prevalent in the Maradi, Dosso, Tillabéri regions and in Niamey.

Other factors could be a source of concern for food security. They include notably:

- a. The avian flu epidemic in Magaria whose impact on food security has not yet been evaluated. The latest situation report indicates a new outbreak in Madarounfa department.
- b. The outbreak of some adult locusts in Aïr and Tamesna and the North of Tahoua region. According to the information systems, a low scale reproduction of the desert locusts is expected in areas where it rained recently. If the seasonal estimates are confirmed, the desert locust populations could increase and constitute a threat for the seeding activity in the agricultural zone.

2.3 Major implications

Due to this unfavourable situation at the onset of the lean period, actions for limiting the crisis have already been undertaken:

- a. Development by the Government of an action plan to support vulnerable populations amounting to CFAF 50.6 billion, including interventions from partners.
- b. Authorisation by the National Food Crisis Prevention and Management Mechanism (DNP-GCA) to use 4 million dollars to purchase

cereals for re-stocking the national security reserves.

- c. Allocation by the DNP-GCA of 6,000 tons for "food for work" in vulnerable zones in the Tillabéri, Dosso and Tahoua regions.
- d. Allocation by the Food Crisis Coordination Unit (CCA) of CFAF 327,978,500 on the Joint Donor Fund (JDF) at the Ministry of Health for nutritional activities.
- e. Ongoing operations by the FAO and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for the distribution of 1,853 tons of seedlings to 2 million beneficiaries.
- f. Overall, WFP has distributed some 17,446 tons of food items to 1.3 million beneficiaries since January 2006.
- g. Increase of the WFP Niger's country programme budget by 4.2% to integrate the Government request in connection with school canteens.

3. Main current issues

3.1 The case of Niger

Although, some efforts are being made, a few concerns remain:

- a. The current capacity to contain a possible aggravation of the crisis during the lean period. The action plan to support vulnerable populations developed by the Government is facing a **funding shortfall of 37%, equivalent to 34.9 million dollars**: *How can such a situation be managed and what are the possible consequences on households' food security?* The level of the national security stock (NSS), as of 22 June, was 20.704 tons. On the same date, the financial results and treasury plans of the food security fund (FSF) and the JDF showed a major shortfall of financial resources available, i.e. 41% and 35% respectively.
- b. Depending on the trend of the rainfall pattern, possible problems of supplies with the coastal countries are to be feared.
- c. Even if the grain market remains stable, extreme poverty of populations in the fragile zones could be a determining factor of the food crisis.

3.2 The case of other countries in the Sahel zone (Guinea Bissau, Chad, Mauritania and Northern and Sahelian parts of Burkina Faso)

As regards the food situation, information sources indicate that there are a few signs of concern for Guinea Bissau, Chad and Mauritania, too.

In **Guinea Bissau**, the production of the past season was estimated at 212,000 tons, representing a deficit of about 215,000 affected people grouped into 43,076 families in the Quinara, Bolama and Cacheu zones. Food insecurity worsened due to the ongoing conflict. On 16 May 2006, the UN launched an appeal of 3.64 million dollars to assist 20,000 victims of more than two months of armed conflict in the country. Moreover, the Government has requested a financial support from the international community to implement a plan estimated at 2.35 million US dollars to address the famine issue affecting 250,000 people in the South. These are mainly people affected by salt water floods that destroy arable lands.

In **Mauritania**, the lean period came 2-3 months earlier than the normal period. The major constraint seems to lie in the difficult management of a production deficit accumulated for 3 – 4 consecutive years in a context of persistent deterioration of the terms of trade and the purchasing power. In most cases, markets are well supplied but the constant increase in prices reduces the capacities of poor families to access agricultural commodities. In the landlocked zones of Adrar and Inchiri, cereal availability could be one aspect of food insecurity. Regarding the desert locusts, the information systems (Agrhymet monthly bulletin, June 2006) indicate the possible presence of mature adults in the South-East of the country, where they could reproduce themselves when the rainy season sets in. Generally, even if the food situation is still difficult, Mauritania has not yet reached a crisis situation.

In **Burkina Faso** the rainy season has been delayed compared to last year and to the normal situation (usually, the first weeding is done mid-July but it is not the case this year). There are still some concerns in the North and the Sahel regions as regards the regularity of the rains.

In **Chad**, the food situation of displaced people and populations in severe risk zones is worsening as the lean period begins. An emergency situation is visible in

such an environment marked by the effects of the Darfour conflict and the internal rebellion in Chad.

4. Which response to provide?

- a. Even if the situation is not yet alarming (CC/SAP bulletin n°113 confirms that market stabilisation continues), the food situation in Niger deserves particular attention and monitoring in order to avoid the situation experienced in 2005. The possibility of an emergency meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention Network should not be excluded in order to assess, as early as possible, the situation and eventually launch emergency warning in time **should the situation progress in that direction.** This would help to ensure timely mobilisation of additional resources for implementation of the mitigation plan developed by the Government of Niger.
- b. Support the concrete realisation of the emergency appeals in Guinea Bissau. The situation as of 18 July 2006 indicates that **less than 10% of the funds required have been received.**
- c. Increase the monitoring of the evolution of pockets of the desert locusts in Niger and Mauritania. The FAO's "Locust Watch" confirms a localised reproduction, and control operations in Algeria and Mauritania, while recommending increased vigilance in the Sahel, where a small-scale reproduction activity is expected in Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Sudan. In Niger, the CC/SAP monthly bulletin n°113 of 10 July 2006 indicates that there are favourable conditions for development of the desert locust in South-East Tamesna and Western part of Tadress.
- d. Anticipating the reflection on the situation of the 2006-2007 agricultural campaign in the entire Sahel region, where, according to estimates, there will be less rainfall during the July-August-September season than in 2005.

»» Sources of information

This analysis is based on information provided by different specialised institutions. For detailed information, you may consult the following documents and sites:

CILSS-Actualité, 2006. *La saison juillet-août-septembre prévue relativement moins pluvieuse que 2005* (www.cilss.bf/actu/actu.php?id_article=45)

Fews Net/PAM, 2006. *Niger : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, juin 2006, 6 p.*

Fews Net, 2006. *Mauritanie : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, juin 2006, 2 p.*

Fews Net/PAM, 2006. *Niger : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, avril 2006, 7 p.*

Fews Net, 2006. *Mauritanie : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, mai 2006, 3 p.*

Fews Net, 2006. *Tchad : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, mai 2006, 5 p.*

Fews Net, 2006. Mali : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, mai 2006, 3 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Sénégal : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, mai 2006, 4 p.

Fews Net, 2006. Burkina Faso : Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire, mai 2006, 2 p.

CRA/CILSS, 2006. Mensuel Agrhymet, juin 2006, n° M04/06, 20 p.

Fews Net/CILSS, 2006. Rapport mensuel sur la sécurité alimentaire au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest, juin 2006, 5 p.

FAO, 2006. Criquet pèlerin : Une reproduction localisée et des opérations de lutte en Algérie et en Lybie : <http://www.fao.org/ag/locusts/fr/info/info/index.html>

WFP, 2006. Summary chart detailing confirmed contributions to Emergency Operations (EMOPs), 18 July 2006, 1 p.

SWAC: www.oecd.org/sah
CILSS: www.cilss.bf et www.agrhymet.ne
Fews Net: www.fews.net
FAO: www.fao.org
WFP: www.wfp.org

►► Towards a better understanding of cross-border exchanges and their impact on food security

A joint evaluation mission of the cereal and cattle sub-sectors and markets visited Niger and Nigeria, specifically the Maradi, Katsina and Kano zone from 11 - 19 May 2006. The mission was composed of representatives from the CILSS, FEWS Net, The *Sahel* and West Africa Club, WAMIS-NET, UNICEF, OCHA and WFP.

The conclusions drawn from the information systems, such as price stabilisation on the cereal market, confirms the findings of this joint mission. The circumstantial aspects of these findings have already been published by the CILSS. The full conclusions of this joint analysis will be available in early September 2006 and accessible on the Web sites of institutions that participated to the mission.