

Main conclusions of the 25th annual meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention Network in the Sahel and West Africa (RPCA), Bamako (Mali), December 2009

Introduction

The 25th annual meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention network in the Sahel and West Africa (RPCA) was held from 8 to 11 December in Bamako (Mali) under the patronage of his Excellency Mr Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali. The meeting was opened by Mr Agatham Ag Alhassane, the Agriculture Minister of the Republic of Mali.

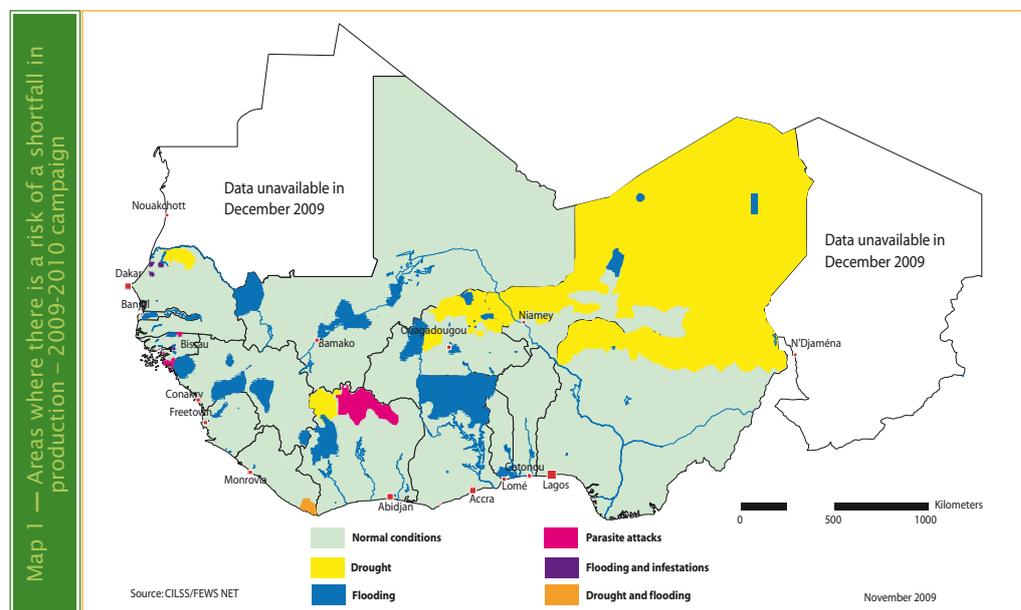
The aim of this meeting was not only to take stock of the 2009-2010 agricultural campaign, but also to hold in-depth discussions on the key issue of “Markets, local product processing and food security in West Africa”.

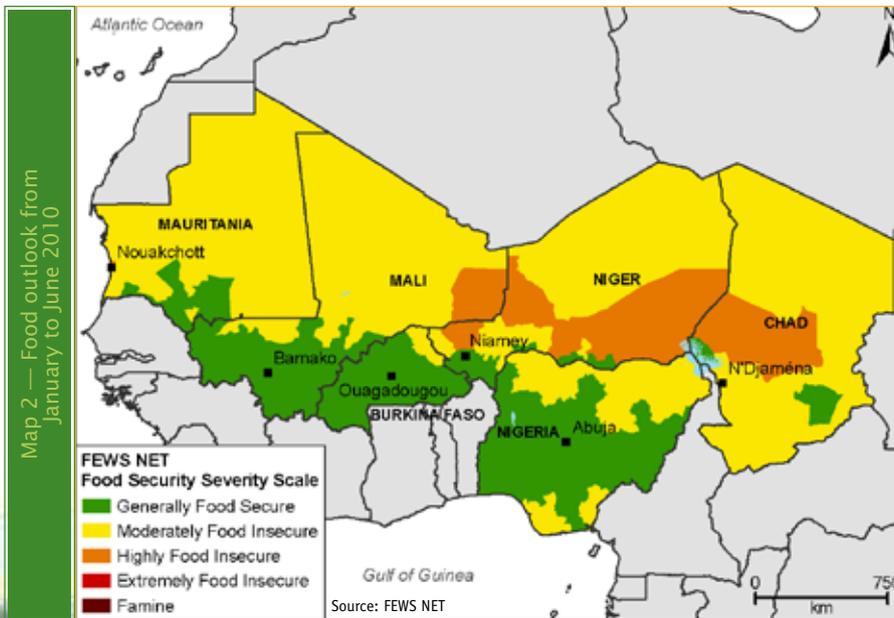
This note has been drawn up to provide decision-makers from Governments, Inter-governmental Organisations (CILSS, UEMOA, ECOWAS) and other actors involved with food security, with a summary of the main conclusions and proposed measures to emerge from the meeting. It therefore supplements the Press release on the 2010 food outlook in the Sahel and West Africa ([Press release of the 25th RPCA meeting](#)). A detailed summary record of the meeting can be consulted on the RPCA website ([Summary record of the 25th RPCA meeting - French](#)).

Main Conclusions

2.1 Situation with regard to food and nutrition

► **A good overall agricultural and pastoral outlook in wetland areas, but a critical situation in Eastern areas of the Sahel.** The provisional forecast for cereal production in 2009-2010 in West African countries, excluding Liberia and Sierra Leone, is estimated to amount to 51 million tonnes, equivalent to production in 2008-2009. Production is down in the Sahel (-9%) and up in coastal countries (+4%) compared with 2008-2009. Compared with average production over the past five years, production





in the Sahel, which is estimated to amount to around 16 million tonnes, is up by 10%. Forecast production of other crops amounts to 44.6 million tonnes of yams, 53.8 million tonnes of manioc, 3.3 million tonnes of taro, 2.1 million tonnes of cowpeas and 2.6 million tonnes of sweet potatoes. Areas where, on the basis of these estimates, there is a risk of a shortfall in production¹ are shown in Map 1.

► **High price levels and reduced stocks in 2009 left low-income families in a precarious situation.** The lean period in 2009 was characterised by exceptionally high cereal prices for the second year running, despite the fall in world prices. The arrival of new

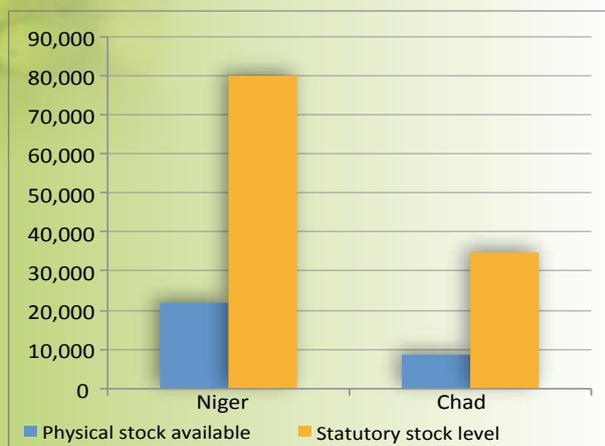
harvests on markets in October helped to improve the availability of food to households and to keep the markets supplied. This was followed by a small seasonal dip in prices. However, the level of cereal, and particularly millet, prices in November 2009 still remained above the average over the past five years. In the 2010 lean period, problems with access are foreseeable in the Eastern Sahel (Niger, Northern Nigeria, Chad, Eastern Mali and North-Eastern Burkina Faso). Map 2 shows the outlook for food insecurity that can already be seen from January to June 2010. This situation is aggravated in countries where the level of national food security stocks is below the statutory stock level (Figure 1).

2.2 Mechanisms for regulating markets and forestalling food crises

► **Government intervention to stabilise food prices may be a means of ensuring long-term agricultural development.** The doctrine consisting in self-regulated risk management in which the free play of supply and demand is allowed to regulate markets without any action on prices has been shown to have severe limitations in recent years inasmuch that prices for food products have been highly volatile. This instability can have a serious impact on food security not only in the short term (consumers' access to food), but also in the long term (the incentive given to producers to invest and increase production). The modernisation of agricultural farms and markets through increased investment by producers, businessmen and States is only possible against a background of relative price stability. Historically, green revolutions have only taken place in situations in which prices have been relatively stable. Moreover, the modernisation of farms makes production less sensitive to unforeseen natural variables (irrigation, treatment against disease and pests, use of environmentally friendly fertilisers, etc.).

Some instruments for managing supply may help reduce price instability and increase potential production. In particular, these are measures aimed at limiting imported products so that market needs are primarily (although not exclusively) met by domestic production. A similar strategy has been followed in Guinea with regard to potatoes and in Cameroon with regard to poultry, and could inspire other West African countries to do likewise. In Guinea, for example, the State has introduced a supplementary tax levied solely for part of the year (during the peak period for onion sales at national level). This measure enabled domestic production to be increased and brought relative price stability. In a context in which international prices play a major role in price instability, government intervention could therefore prove necessary to regulate markets and promote investment in the agricultural sector and reduce food insecurity. However, the choice and effectiveness of the instruments to use must be based on the causes of price instability.

Figure 1 — National food security stocks available (in tonnes) in Niger and Chad in January 2010



1. Data for Mauritania and Chad were not available when the map was drawn up.

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- ▶ **A warning indicator based on an analysis of trends in leader markets could be useful for the regional monitoring system.** An analysis of 50 markets for millet and 30 markets for maize (in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) made it possible to determine the mechanisms that propagate food crises in West Africa. This analysis showed in particular that crises are preceded by a period of high prices (higher than their trend value) which generally starts in September. If the price level remains above its trend value during the months of October, November and December, the risk of a food crisis rises from March and April onwards. Even if the results generated by this model have limitations, monitoring the prices of certain “leader” markets would help to predict current prices in a large number of regional markets and allow regional monitoring systems to foresee food crises more effectively. Additional investigations regarding the scope for product substitution in particular might be necessary to improve this tool.

2.3 Processing of local products

- ▶ **Changes in eating habits and growing urbanisation benefit the market for processed local products.** Increased consumption of foreign food products has been observed for several decades now. Observation of this trend led to the introduction of the regional programme for the promotion of local products in the Sahel (PROCELOS) launched in the 1980s by the CILSS and the SWAC. The consumption of urban populations in particular has shifted to imported products, primarily due to their low prices. The current international context characterised by high food product prices could allow processed local products to capture market share. This new departure in terms of the processing of food products would allow food security to be improved, in particular through long conservation periods and greater ease of product use. This renewed interest should also allow the issue of the processing of local agricultural products to be incorporated into agricultural and food security policy strategies.

Main recommendations and measures to be taken

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3.1 Recommendations regarding the food and nutritional situation

- ▶ **Policy-makers** are recommended to increase support for production, particularly of out-of-season crops, by supplying inputs (improved seeds and fertilisers) and water management technologies, to facilitate the implementation of actions and/or measures aimed at providing access to livestock feed, herd mobility and the free circulation of livestock products in accordance with regional agreements.
- ▶ **The CILSS** is recommended to speed up creation of the network of companies/offices tasked with the management of national food security stocks in order to strengthen regional solidarity in crisis situations more effectively.
- ▶ **Agricultural information systems (CILSS, FEWS NET, FAO, PAM, national agencies)** are recommended to carry out a detailed analysis, by as early as January 2010, of food and nutritional vulnerability so that the populations affected can be better targeted and appropriate responses proposed to mitigate any possible crises and strengthen adaptation capacities, particularly among vulnerable pastoral populations. This assessment must also stress the monitoring of markets and cross-border trade. It is also recommended that technical and financial partners support all actions relating to the harmonised framework for identifying areas at risk and vulnerable groups so that actions aimed at improving the food and nutritional situation during the lean period can be better targeted
- ▶ It is recommended that **West African regional integration organisations** provide the CILSS with the resources it needs to extend its monitoring activities to the entire West African region.
- ▶ **All actors** (decision-makers, NGOs, humanitarian organisations and development partners) are recommended to take steps to improve the co-ordination of their interventions and/or measures aimed at facilitating access to food, the provision of care for people suffering from malnutrition and at strengthening the means of existence of the most vulnerable populations.

3.2 Recommendations regarding market regulation instruments

- ▶ Pursue in greater depth the analysis and reflection on the effectiveness and impacts of different measures to combat high price levels;
- ▶ Apply supply management instruments to stabilise prices in the medium and long terms and promote investment in the agricultural sector;

- ▶ Promote the creation of grouped stocks from producer organisations, and
- ▶ Enhance production potential at the regional level through support for the implementation of mobilising programmes drawn up within the framework of the ECOWAP/CAADP.

3.3 Recommendations regarding the processing of local products

- ▶ Promote policies and measures which encourage the development of the agro-food industry. These measures could relate to (i) removal of taxes on certain basic items of equipment required for agro-food processing; (ii) reduction in the fees charged by food product quality control laboratories; (iii) support for purchases of appropriate packaging, conditioning and processing of local cereals and legumes given their high rate of local consumption.
- ▶ Step up research and development with a view to developing products that are accessible to operators and consumers.
- ▶ Support and encourage initiatives that satisfy specific needs such as the enriched flour Misola, a fortified food manufactured from local cereals which can be used for therapeutic and preventative treatment of infant malnutrition.

3.4 Recommendations regarding commercial pressures on West African land *(The detailed summary record of the meeting is available on Internet)*

- ▶ Strengthen the negotiating capacities of States in order to propose land regulations and governance that are conducive to investment and that respect the rights of all users of land;
- ▶ Gain a deeper knowledge of large-scale land purchases in West Africa with a view to informing the lines of approach to and decisions regarding land policies;
- ▶ Draw up common policies and strategies at the regional level with regard to land management and governance. Several initiatives regarding land tenure have already been deployed, notably by regional integration organisations (ECOWAS, UEMOA and the CILSS). A regional workshop might be necessary to agree upon a common action plan and would ensure the consistency of all initiatives at the regional level concerning land issues.

What is the RPCA?

- ▶ The Food Crisis Prevention Network in the Sahel and West Africa (RPCA) was set up in 1984 at a time when the Sahel had been hard hit by a severe drought with dramatic human and economic consequences. The Network comprises several categories of member including bilateral and multilateral aid agencies (USA, EU, Canada, France, Italy, Austria, etc.), international and sub-regional organisations and regional food security monitoring systems (ECOWAS, UEMOA, the CILSS, SWAC/OECD, FAO, WFP, WMO, UNICEF, ECHO, OCHA, etc.), specialised NGOs (Oxfam, Afrique Verte, ICRC, Save the Children), professional agricultural organisations (ROPPA), etc. The RPCA provides a forum in which to pursue a variety of discussions and actions on food security in the region. As a platform for discussion and free and informal reflection, the Network, through its annual meeting, provides a genuine and permanent framework for analysis of the agricultural and food situation and for decision-making.
- ▶ One of the Network's major achievements was the adoption of the Food Aid Charter in 1990, a document which largely inspired the development of the International Convention on Food Aid Charter (London, 1999). Another RPCA product is the monthly Information Note on Food Security in the Sahel and West Africa (FOSIN).
- ▶ The Network is managed by the CILSS and the SWAC/OECD. Further information is available on the RPCA website: www.food-security.net

Photos: World Bank, Ray Witlin, Curt Carnemark, Josef Hadar, Francois Le Gall

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