FOOD SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

January 2012

Key Points

- <u>**Sahel Alert – vulnerable populations estimated. Burkina = 1.6m; Niger 5.4m; Mauritania; 0.7m; Mali 3m; Senegal 850.000 (under validation). Estimates for Chad not finalized**</u>
- Ongoing off-season production will not significatively change the provisional results of this year's harvest
- An immediate response from all actors to the risks of a food security in the region is essential
- **Markets** : unusual high food prices, especially in the Central Basin. Governments set up export restrictions on cereals in Burkina Faso and Mali

Elevated risk of food and nutrition insecurity in large areas of the Sahel

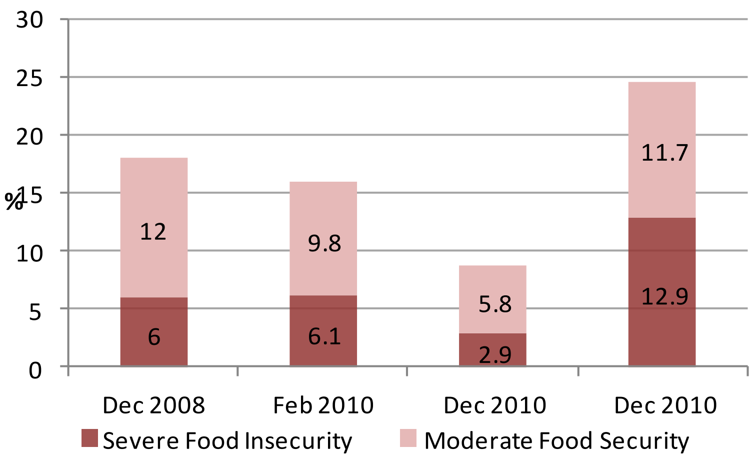
In Niger, the preliminary estimated results of the 'rural and urban household food insecurity and vulnerability' survey were published January 13. The results show that, as of December 2011, over 5.4m persons (34,9 % of the population) were food insecure, of which 1.3m were severely food insecure. The child malnutrition rate is above the warning threshold in Niger. For instance, in the Western drought-affected region of Tillabéry, the global acute malnutrition rate is over 13% according to the preliminary results of the October 2011 nutrition survey, approaching the 15% emergency threshold.

According to the results of the survey on the impact of the rainfall deficit and price increases on household food security of December 2011; 24,6% of rural households i**n Mauritania** are food insecure, of which over half (12,9%) have a 'poor' food consumption level (Fig 1). That represents almost three times the levels observed in December 2010 in rural areas. The food insecurity rates are the highest since the set up of the food security monitoring system in Mauritania.

The SAP survey **in Burkina Faso** confirms that some 1.67m people are vulnerable to food insecurity, mainly in northern and central areas of the country. Other surveys are underway to determine the most affected livelihood groups.

In Senegal, the final results of the SMART survey organized by the Minisitry of Health from 2 November to 22 December 2011 (post-harvest) show that global acute malnutrition rates between 5 and 10% in the regions of Kedougou, Kolda, Louga, Saint Louis, Tambacounda and Thiès. The prevalence is 10.3% in Diourbel and 14.1% in Matam. The survey did not cover other Senegalese regions. The prevalence of severe acute malnutrition for children aged 6 to 59 months has reached the critical threshold of 2% in Matam. Morbidity is high in all regions and has probably contributed to the degradation of children's nutritional status.

Figure 1 : Food insecurity trends in rural Mauritania in post-harvest period since 2008



Source : ESAM 2011

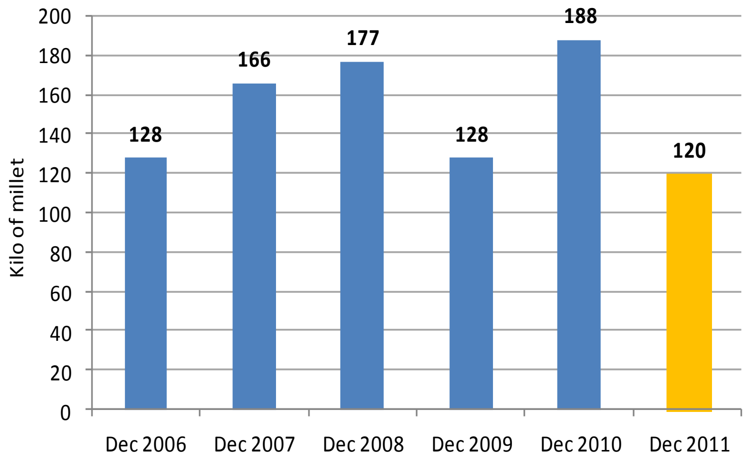
Elevated risk of food and nutrition insecurity in large areas of the Sahel (cont'd)

In order to avoid an aggravation of the situation, the nutrition status of children aged 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women in the Sahel must continue to be monitored, especially in food deficit areas.

The effects of drought and price increases (page 3) are leading to a **drop in income for farmers and agro-pastoralists**. The trend is leading to a deterioration in terms of trade for livestock owners. In December 2011 Ndjamena, a herder could obtain 120 kg of millet by selling a ram, below the average of 157 kg (Fig 2). The high price of millet is driving the observed decline in terms of trade.

In most of the countries affected by the crisis, households are already implementing **resilience strategies** that are characteristic of the lean season (migration, livestock sales, reduction of food consumption) that affect their long term resiliency.

Figure 2 : Terms of trade sheep/millet in Ndjamena market



Source : CILSS FAO FEWS NET PAM missions

The off season and preparation of the response to the crisis in the Sahel

In the Sahel, the rainfed crop harvest has ended and the final grain production results including flood recession and off season productions will be shared at the upcoming meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention Network of March 2012. Those productions represent a limited share of overall grain production and will not significantly alter provisional results, especially in areas that experienced severe rainfall anomalies (late start, interruption of rains, early cessation of rainfall). In January, off season crops are in place where access to water remains possible.

Flood recession cropping opportunities along the Senegal river are limited due to a weak rise in the river, which has limited planting possibilities. In Mali, the rise in rivers was weak compared to last year; water levels are inferior or much lower than last year and average on the country's main waterways, compromising access to water for flood recession and off season crops.

The **pastoral situation** remains of concern. In Mali, Afrique Verte reports that the ministry of livestock indicated that 400 of the country's 703 communes are in 'crisis' and that 60% of biomass has been lost. Consequently, the livestock is unsatisfactory as grassy and ligneous pastures are less garnished. Drinking water availability has become a major concern due to the of natural water points, including in Mauritania, Chad, and the cercles of Douentza, Koro and Bankass in MalI. Animal body conditions nonetheless remain satisfactory. The production of main animal byproducts (milk, meat and eggs) has decreased in all regions.

With respect to **the desert locust situation**, in spite of a decrease in numbers in the north west of Mauritania, isolated winged adults will persist in the area in January. In Niger, rainfall in the Air Mountains where small scale reproduction was taking place will probably continue into January. It is expected that desert locust numbers will remain below critical thresholds.

The **results of the off season harvest** will not moderate the high risk of a food access crisis in large parts of the Sahel. Actors are preparing to respond to the risks. 17 January 2012, Niger launched its Consolidated Appeal Process for some USD 229m to assist 3.8m people. The regional Strategy of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), to prepare for the food, nutrition and pastoral crisis is being revised. It will strengthen preparation at the regional level, support coordination of the response and monitoring.

International grain markets settle down

The **FAO prices index** (Fig 3) for December 2011 dropped to 211 points, a 2.4% drop since November and an 11.3% drop since the record level reached in February 2011. The decline is precipitated by lower grain prices, sugar and oil prices.

In December 2011, **world rice prices** also dropped significantly on most export markets. Buyers are successfully playing off exporters, thanks to low prices in India. The decrease in prices is expected to continue in upcoming weeks. Longer term prospects, however, are less certain as they will depend on policy decisions in importing and exporting countries.

Figure 3 : Prices for cereals on international markets

Source : FAO

Prices remain high, especially in the central basin

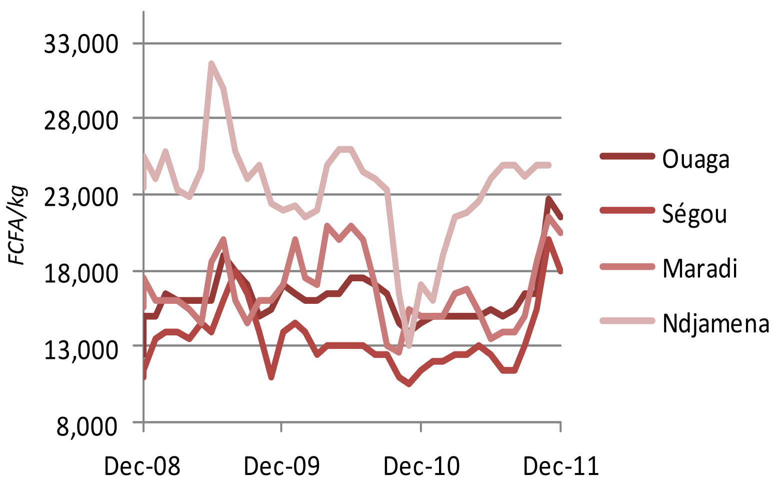
After having experienced unusual increases from October to December 2011, which brought coarse grain prices to high levels, prices are heterogeneous in January 2012. **Whereas prices** dropped in Ségou (-10%); Bobo Dioulasso (-13%) and Bamako (-7%), increases continued in Dori (+15%), Fada Ngourma (+20%) and Sikasso (+11%) compared to December, underscoring the strain under which of markets in the central basin are operating. In Niger, prices are on the increase in most markets. Compared to the 5-year average, prices are 50 to 60% above average in Mali and Burkina Faso, and 30 to 40% above average in Niger and Chad.

According to observations in the field, wholesaler pressure on available grain stocks (which reached high level in the aftermath of the harvest) has somewhat abated. **Coarse grain price levels** nonetheless remain well above average on the main markets of the Sahel. It is likely that after this 'pause', price increases will resume, given the current strength of demand, and its probable increase as household grain reserves decline. The implementation of restrictions to cross-border trade will also sustain high prices in deficit areas.

During January 2012, **Nigerian trade** with the region slowed due to the closure of the border in the northeast and the increase of the cost of fuel in the country. If it is hoped that the border closure will be temporary, the policy has reduced volumes of grains and cash crops with Niger and Chad. By contrast, the significant increase in fuel prices (+50% compared to December) will have more durable consequences on the cost of the foodstuffs Nigeria exports, but also on the cost of transportation in Niger, which largely relies on smuggler Nigerian fuel.

Due to concern for the food security situation, governments **extended measures** limiting the export of grain in December. In Burkina, a circular prohibits the export of grain since December 2011. In Mali, the export of grain is subject to a permit delivered by authorities on a case by case basis. Consequently, informal exports and irregular payments are increasing, raising the cost of transport and lead times to food deficit areas. These policies will limit price increases in food surplus areas, they will only exacerbate supply difficulties in food deficit areas. The repeated export bans might, over time, discourage production.

Figure 4 : Price for millet in Ouagadougou, Ségou, Maradi and N'Djamena



Source : données FAO/GIEWS

Government grain purchases are taking place in the region

Government grain purchases are taking place in the region

- **In Niger**, the purchase of 43,000 mt grain is underway, in addition to the 15,000 mt by WFP.
- **In Chad**, half of the ONASA stock has been sold on the market in mid-January. The 100kg bag of cereals is being sold at 10.000 FCFA.
- **In Mali**, contracts have been signed for the purchase of 10 900 mt of millet, sorghum and maize to be delivered in Ségou and a tender for 20,000 mt has been launched. The OPAM is awaiting financial resources in order to purchase an additional 34,600 mt.
- **In Mauritania**, the food security commission purchased 3,100 tons of wheat in 2011 and will purchase the same quantity in 2012.
- **In Burkina Faso**, the government recently purchased 800mt grain which will be added to 6,500 mt of the intervention stock and 24 000 tons of the national security stock.

Government efforts to replenish their reserves may be compromised by lack of funding.

Recommendations for the regional food security and nutrition

Measures	Advantages
Support affected countries to implement food and nutrition household assessments	The number of households to assist is identified, and targeting is improved
Update the Sahel Strategy in order to localize, target and quantify the response	Mobilisation of resources is undertaken in a timely fashion
Support countries having developed emergency plans in the implementation of their response activities	Countries launch timely responses to the food, nutrition and livelihood crises
Monitor market indicators in order to determine the respective roles of in kind and cash assistance	Timely, evidence-based decisions are made, avoiding the pitfalls of last minute changes in the lean season.

Conclusions

- The risk of a food crisis is confirmed in many areas of the Sahel. Emergency plans put into place by governments will not entirely cover household consumption gaps where the lean season has already begun (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad).
- High food prices and a drop in income for agricultural and pastoralist households are compounding food availability problems. Markets remain tight, government actions are adding to existing constraints.
- Immediate support to governmental programmes is essential to ensure an adequate response. The impact of higher food prices and market supply must be closely monitored as they could influence the implementation of cash transfers, especially in the central basin where price increases have been strongest.

Food security information in West Africa and the Sahel

www.wfp.org/food-security

Mrs. Naouar Labidi
Naouar.Labidi@wfp.org

M. Jean-Martin Bauer
Jean-Martin.Bauer@wfp.org

M. Cédric Charpentier
Cedric.charpentier@wfp.org

http://www.fao.org/emergencies/en/

M. Jose Luis Fernandez
Joseluis.Fernandez@fao.org

M. Patrick David
Patrick.David@fao.org

M. Pape Boubacar Soumaré
PapaBoubacar.Soumare@fao.org