

SPECIAL REPORT

FAO/WFP CROP AND FOOD SUPPLY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO MALI, WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON LOSSES DUE TO THE DESERT LOCUST

21 December 2004

Highlights

- At the time of writing this report, the Mali government had not yet published its preliminary harvest estimates. The mission based its own estimates on historical production data together with data on crop losses from a survey carried out in August by the Ministry of Agriculture's early warning system. According to information updated to the end of October, 2004-2005 total cereal output, which should amount to 2 933 000 tonnes, is up by 11 percent compared with the averages for 1999-2000 and 2003-2004. This figure is equal to 86 percent of the exceptional volume of production recorded last year.
- The greatest crop losses due to locust infestation and drought were in rainfed millet (37 000 tonnes), cowpeas (3 000 tonnes) and sorghum (9 000 tonnes). Although there have been considerable localized losses, there have not been any major repercussions at the national level and good results have been recorded in the large agricultural regions in the south.
- The development of pasture has also been affected by desert locust attacks and the rainfall situation. Locust damage has been fairly localized, affecting woody and pastoral areas more noticeably, especially along the border with Mauritania. The percentage of pastures damaged by locusts and drought ranges from 7 percent in Koulikoro to 18 percent in Gao.
- The southern cotton-producing regions have not been affected by locust infestation and have suffered from drought to a lesser extent than many regions in the north of the country.
- Domestic cereal supplies and the country's regular imports are covering the people's needs. The countrywide food situation should therefore be satisfactory in 2005.
- Nevertheless, in the areas infested by desert locusts, there have been large crop losses and the food situation of the people is already precarious. Some measures will have to be taken to alleviate food shortages in these regions.
- Countrywide, the food situation of households is adequate.

1. OVERVIEW

At the start of 2004 it became clear that, in the Sahel, Mali was one of the countries most at risk of agricultural production losses due to a potentially enormous growth in the desert locust population. In August, large numbers of swarms and hopper bands began to devour the vegetation along a strip of the crop and pasture zone between the 15th and 17th parallels. As a result, FAO joined forces with WFP and CILSS to help establish the annual forecast for agricultural production before the harvest and to assess the impact of locust infestation on crops, livestock and household vulnerability. A FEWS-NET representative joined the team and actively participated in the field visit and subsequent analysis of the data gathered.

The mission, accompanied by an EU observer, worked in collaboration with Mali's government institutions responsible for monitoring the agricultural season, namely:

- the CPS (Planning and Statistics Group)
- the DNAMR (National Department for Rural Support)
- the DNSI (National Department for Statistics and IT)
- the SAP (Early Warning System Project)
- the (Food Security Commission)
- the DNM (National Department for Meteorology)

At the time of the mission, the CPS was putting the finishing touches to the analysis of a detailed agricultural survey of around 12 000 households countrywide. The sample was about six times larger than the one employed for the usual annual survey and so it was expected that the information would be much



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME



WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME, ROME

more precise than that obtained in recent years. However, at the time of writing of this report (the beginning of November), the survey conclusions were not yet available and the government of Mali had not published its official estimates for agricultural production in 2004-2005. As a result, the mission established the estimates given in this report on the basis of its own survey of crop losses and other reports published by the above-mentioned government bodies. Three teams went into the field to interview rural households, local authorities, technicians involved in the field of agriculture and food security, and NGOs. These teams covered the seriously infested regions of Mopti, Ségou and Koulikoro.

The findings of the mission are as follows:

The locust threat, first reported in June in the northern part of the country, was evident in July and, by August and September most of the regions above the 14th parallel had been affected by infestations of desert locusts.

The largest crop losses due to locust infestation affected the production of non-rainfed millet (37 000 tonnes), cowpeas (3 000 tonnes) and sorghum (9 000 tonnes). Although these losses were spectacular and extensive at the local level in a good number of the 78 *communes* affected, national cereal production is largely guaranteed by the zones situated further south of the regions affected and Sikasso region.

Given the relatively limited area and importance of the agricultural zones infested by locusts, total cereal production for 2004-2005, which should reach 2 933 000 tonnes, is up by 11 percent compared with the averages for 1999-2000 and 2003-2004. This figure is equal to 86 percent of the exceptional volume of production recorded last year.

Market supplies have been satisfactory throughout this year following excellent harvests in the 2003/04 season. Until September, cereal prices were significantly down compared with the previous season. However, in the zones affected by locust invasion, prices have begun to increase since July (the critical lean period) despite a relatively good level of supplies to markets in these areas.

For the 2004/05 season, cereal supplies have been assessed at 2 934 000 tonnes as against the 2 951 700 tonnes required and so 17 700 tonnes will have to be imported. In practice, this indicates a balanced situation for the country if exports are maintained. On average, Mali imports nearly 100 000 tonnes of cereals according to government statistics but it exports the same amount. The risk of a cereals shortage this year is therefore very low.

The markets should be well supplied. Prices will be higher than in 2004 when they were particularly low following record harvests in the 2003 season, but the food situation countrywide should be satisfactory.

Nevertheless, in the zones infested by desert locusts, the millet and cowpea crops have been practically destroyed. The price of cereals will clearly rise in these areas and the local populations will have few resources to pay for them. Their food situation will therefore be precarious. Some form of assistance should be planned urgently to address a food crisis in these regions.

This report has been prepared by S. Hebie, N. Beninati, J.A. Scaglia and Mamadou Diouf, under the responsibility of the FAO and WFP Secretariats with information from official and other sources. Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact the undersigned for further information if required.

*Henri Josserand
Chief, GIEWS, FAO
Fax: 0039-06-5705-4495
E-mail: giews1@fao.org*

*Mustapha Darboe
Regional Director, ODD WFP
Fax: 0022-1-84235632
E-mail: Mustapha.Darboe@wfp.org*

Please note that this Special Report is also available on the Internet as part of the FAO World Wide Web (www.fao.org) at the following URL address: <http://www.fao.org/giews/>

The Special Alerts/Reports can also be received automatically by E-mail as soon as they are published, by subscribing to the GIEWS/Alerts report ListServ. To do so, please send an E-mail to the FAO-Mail-Server at the following address: mailserv@mailserv.fao.org, leaving the subject blank, with the following message:

subscribe GIEWSAlertsWorld-L

To be deleted from the list, send the message:

unsubscribe GIEWSAlertsWorld-L

Please note that it is now possible to subscribe to regional lists to only receive Special Reports/Alerts by region: Africa, Asia, Europe or Latin America (GIEWSAlertsAfrica-L, GIEWSAlertsAsia-L, GIEWSAlertsEurope-L and GIEWSAlertsLA-L). These lists can be subscribed to in the same way as the worldwide list.