Regional Highlights

Northern region

- Precipitation conditions in the middle, western and northern portions of the region were highly uneven thus prompting concerns about a delay in the arrival of early crops and impact of a prolonged lean season on poor families. On the other hand, growing conditions were much better in the eastern districts comprising: East Gonja, Nanumba North, Nanumba South, Kpandai, parts of Yendi and Zabzugu-Tatale where rains in early May aided the planting of groundnuts, maize, and yams.

- In 96% of sentinel sites, own-produced grain reserves are the main source of food which is comparable to the previous month. Most men in these sentinel sites (75%) are raising income through the sale of agricultural crops, complemented with the occasional sale of livestock while women raise their income through petty trade (36%), complemented with diverse sources such as the sale of farm produce and their labour.

- As compared to the previous year and the five-year average, maize prices are high by 22% and 37.5% respectively. The recent upward price adjustment cuts across both supply and consumer markets and may be a response to decreasing stocks which characterize this time of the year.

Upper East Region

- The annual rate of inflation which fell slightly to 8.90% from 9.02% in April has been attributed to a downward trend in food and non-alcoholic beverage groups. This is however not reflected in the price of staple food commodities in the three northern regions and normal deterioration in food security indicators is likely to increase the incidence of malnutrition among market-dependent households.

- Food availability at the household level vary considerably between the surplus grain producing areas of Fumbisi in the western part of the region and the food deficit areas in various parts of the region. The food security situation in most localities is generally promising as 88% of sentinel sites are continuing to rely on their own-produced food to feed their families.

- Due to unstable market conditions, the price of maize recorded an increase of 26% between April and May 2011 in Bolgatanga. During this same period, Bawku and Navrongo recorded slight increases of 4.3% and 4.4% respectively while a significant increase of 16% was recorded in Zebilla. Though now stable, the nominal price of maize at ₋11.3 is comparable to its level of ₋13.3 in May 2008 which was a difficult period following the floods and dry spells of the 2007 growing season.

Upper West

- Although goat-to-maize terms of trade at 71kg, remains favourable, persistent price increases are likely to reverse the situation, increasing financial pressure on food deficit households. If the weather continues to be favourable by July ending, cowpea will be harvested and could improve households’ access to food.

- The proportion of sentinel sites which still rely on own-produced food reserves at 100% is comparable to the previous month, but the current trend is also characterized by an increasing reliance on casual labor and remittances to boost households’ food consumption. Similarly, the sale of agricultural produce in preparation for input purchases and land preparation increased substantially from 44% in April to 69% in May.

- Maize prices is 61.5% above its level for the previous year in Tumu with prices following a similar pattern in most major markets such as Wa and Lawra. The price of millet also remained stable between April and May and is 20.5% and 23.8 % higher than the four-year average in Tumu and Wa respectively.
1.0 Seasonal Progress
The start of the 2011 growing season has been largely mixed with different parts of northern Ghana receiving varying amounts of rainfall in the three dekads of May. Contrary to forecast by the Ghana Meteorological Agency, the delayed and lower-than-normal rains interspersed with long intervals of dryness have affected crop germination, prompting the use of poor quality seeds in some cases and could eventually jeopardize the outcome of the next harvest. Already some households in the region are facing significant difficulties in accessing food as prices are higher than their level for May 2010 and the five-year average. Field reports from officers of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture suggest that only a small proportion of farmers planted in May when compared to 2010 with scattered planting of early millet in parts of Bulisa, and Kassena-Nankana East Districts of the Upper East Region while planting of rice, cowpea, sorghum, millet, groundnuts and maize was reported in parts of Wa West, Wa East, and Wa Municipal. In most of these localities, only 20% of farmers had ploughed their fields and planted some crops. The start of the growing season has also been marked by a large number of rain storms which destroyed property and rendered many families homeless. Though destructive rain storms have been reported in the three regions, the worst affected is the Bawku Municipality in Upper East Region where 123 schools and 3,639 homes were destroyed in April and May. These hazards are likely to increase pressure on the financial resources of farmers who are saddled with high cost of inputs, land preparation and the purchase of food for their households.

The erratic rainfall pattern has however helped the regeneration of pastures and the watering of animals. In key food producing districts of West Gonja, Sissala West and Sissala East districts where the agricultural season starts in June with the planting of maize, groundnuts, sorghum and cowpea, the season is expected to begin on time as the rains will likely stabilize by that time. Over the next few months, agro-meteorological conditions will likely be characterized by occasional spells of dry conditions, which may affect various agricultural activities and the progress of the season. The average cost of ploughing an acre of land increased from ¢30 cedis in 2010 to about ¢40 cedis in 2011 in most parts of northern Ghana. The increased cost of land preparation could increase the financial burden of farmers with the potential to reduce the size of land they are able to cultivate. The start of the farming season will increase demand for agricultural labour, providing income earning opportunities for food purchasing households.

2.0 Food Security Summary
The food situation in northern Ghana is generally fair to good as most locations are experiencing a normal start of the lean season characterized by gradual decline in food reserves and an upward adjustment in market prices of food commodities. Supply and consumer markets are continuing to see good availability, with considerable carryover stocks in warehouses and more being offloaded into the market by farmers. In 96% of sentinel sites, own-produced food reserves are the main source of food, which is comparable to April 2011. In spite of the favourable availability situation, indicators of food access such as market prices are unfavourable due to increased demand to feed refugees from Cote d’Ivoire and returnees from Libya as well as growing exports to neighbouring countries. As these reserves continue to dwindle rapidly during the lean season, households will resort to various coping mechanisms to sustain their food access, including using of their labour supply, borrowing from well-off neighbours against future harvest and sale of fuel wood. Poor and food deficit rural households as well as poor urban dwellers could be worst affected by rising prices of cereal grains due to the growing strain on their purchasing power. In some localities, the return of migrant labourers from Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions and their injection of money to sustain households’ food purchase would temporarily ease problems of food access.

The annual rate of inflation which fell slightly to 8.90% from 9.02% in April has been attributed to a downward trend in food and non-alcoholic beverage groups. This is however not reflected in the price of staple food commodities in the three northern regions and unfavourable food access indicators is likely to increase the incidence of malnutrition among market dependent households as their access may be hampered by the high prices of food and non-food items while daily labour wages have not improved.

The impact of the mixed start-of-the season, characterized by the sporadic rainfall pattern could precipitate low grain availability at the peak of the lean season if poor progress of the season pre-empts speculations about a poor harvest. This could result in market traders holding back their inventories in anticipation of higher prices in future. On the other hand, regular distribution of precipitation and good rainfall conditions could help raise prospects about the next harvest,
triggering an increased supply of grain as market traders hasten to offload their supplies before prices decrease. This could provide food deficit or market dependent households with improved access to cereal grains.

2.1 Northern Region
Regional and district markets continue to benefit from steady supply of crops as traders take full advantage of the high demand for food commodities throughout the country to sell more to maximize their financial gains. The current market supplies are characterized by offloading of stocks by well-off farmers in preparation to acquire inputs. On the other hand, many poor farmers who are already using their meager income to purchase food will not be able purchase adequate inputs to increase their crop production. In 96% of sentinel sites, own-produced food reserves are the main source of food which is comparable to the previous month. Most men in these sentinel sites (75%) are raising income through the sale of agricultural crops, complemented with the occasional sale of livestock, while women raise their income through petty trade (36%), complemented with diverse sources such as the sale of farm produce. Both men and women are also increasing relying on daily labour wages to supply their income. The food security situation in most riverine communities has deteriorated due to the loss of all field crops during the past growing season to floods.

Rains in large parts of the region were highly unstable, prompting concerns that the poor early rains could prolong the impact of the lean season on poor families. However, growing conditions were much better in the eastern districts of the Northern Region comprising East Gonja, Nanumba North and South, Kpandai, parts of Yendi and Zabzugu-Tatale Districts where rains in early May aided the planting of groundnuts, maize, and yams. Yam, which is a key crop in this part of region, is in advance stage of development and new tubers are expected in the market by early August. In May, many farmers undertook clearance sale of old yam to purchase inputs. Major market supply of grain from key food producing areas will ensure steady inflows for the lean season, but this is unlikely to cause a decrease in food prices due to the seasonal decline in food availability.

The delay in the start of the farming season in the middle, western and northern portions of the region is expected to overstretch the food stocks as the arrival of new grains is likely to delay for the majority of household. In the flood affected areas where limited food assistance has been delivered, many poor households would likely be highly food insecure during the lean season, potentially increasing the risk of chronic malnutrition.

2.2 Upper East Region
Food availability at the household level varies considerably between the surplus grain producing areas of Fumbisi in the western part of the region and the food deficit areas in various parts of the region. The food security situation in most localities is generally promising as 88% of sentinel sites are continuing to rely on their own produced food to feed their families. Thus, essential staples are generally well supplied in all local markets in the region. The start of the growing season will see an increased demand for labour for weeding, fertilizer application and planting, providing poor households an avenue to improve their access to food. The increase in daily wage labour rate from ɛ3.6 in April to ɛ4.0 in May is a possible indication of temporary labour scarcity for planting and land preparation as both poor and well-off households are all working on their fields.

While the share of households’ income from sale of agricultural produce continues to decrease, the share of income from the sale of livestock increased from 35.7% in April to 56% in May. The favourable terms of trade for goat-maize grain, which is attributed to stable livestock prices, is enabling households which own these animals to purchase up to 63.4 kg. The food security situation of poor households will continue to worsen between now and early September when some grains may become available from an early harvest. However, food security conditions could be further strained by the late onset of the rains in some parts of the region which has undermined the early planting of hunger-stopping crops like early millet. The impact of market price shocks on households’ access to food may be influenced by the quality and progress of the agricultural season with a poor outlook for the season during the peak of the lean season likely to exacerbate price increases.
2.3 Upper West Region
Household food availability in most parts of the region remains good, albeit on a decline due to seasonal trends in food supply. The hunger season is generally expected to be normal due to the adequacy of stocks from the last harvest although general reduction in the quantity and nutritional quality of food is expected during this period. Food deficit households currently experiencing a rapid depletion of their food reserve are managing the situation by reducing the quantity of food consumed and the number of meals as well as limiting the diversity of food consumed. The proportion of sentinel sites which still rely on own produced food reserves at 100% is comparable to the previous month, but the current trend is also characterized by an increasing reliance on casual labour and remittances to boost households’ food consumption. Farmers in the region as a whole have started offloading excess stocks in the market to raise money for the purchase of agricultural inputs and as a result, the share of income from the sale of agricultural produced increased from 44% in April to 69% in May. The food availability situation among some farming households in the western parts of the region could improve by July as cowpea harvest is expected to complement depleted reserves. However, conditions are expected to remain stable in the eastern districts where the majority of maize growers are relatively self-sufficient in food reserves.

For a greater part of the lean season, food poor households scattered in the western districts of the region are unlikely to meet their food needs with the limited labour opportunities and occasional sale of small ruminants to raise income and may be highly food insecure. Although goat-to-maize terms of trade at 71kg, remains favourable, persistent price increases are likely to reverse the situation, increasing financial pressure on food deficit households.

3.0 Price trends and marketing activities
3.1 Northern Region
Regular market supply of cereals from surplus producing areas is ensuring adequate grain inflows to consumer markets in urban areas where traders are continuing to provide large stocks of grains to meet market demand. Producers with extra stocks have begun selling in the market to raise funds for agricultural production. However, the good availability of food has failed to translate into a decrease in prices due to increased demand associated with the influx of refugees from Cote d’Ivoire and returnees from Libya and Tunisia. Maize prices were stable between April and May after a 15% increase between March and April (Figure 1). As compared to the previous year and the five-year average, maize price is high by 22% and 37.5% respectively. The recent price adjustment cuts across both supply and consumer markets and may be a response to decreasing stocks which characterize this time of the year.

Markets across the three northern regions witnessed an influx of traders purchasing from markets such as Zabzugu, Gusheigu, Nalerigu, Yendi and Saboba for export to Burkina Faso between April and May. Maize price increases range from 50% in Gushengu to 37% in Zabzugu and 20% in Saboba. Although regular trade exists between markets in northern Ghana and southern Ghana during this time of the year, the level of market demand is considerably this year. In particular, price of groundnuts, beans and maize have gone up considerably.
3.2 Upper East Region
Urban Markets in the region are adequately fed with grain supplies from Nalerigu, Gushegu, Karaga, Langbinsi and Mankarigu in the Northern Region as well as Fumbisi within the region. The gradual reduction in the volume of supplies is driving up prices and increasing the necessity for poor households to resort to less expensive foods such as konkonte (cassava flour). As the lean season progresses and excess stocks designated by farmers to raise funds for farming are all exhausted, the prices of grains will increase, putting strains on the purchasing power of food-purchasing households. Against the backdrop of reduced income earning opportunities for the majority of food insecure households in the region, very high prices of staples in Bongo, Zebilla and the surrounding communities pose a serious treat to food access.

Due to unstable market conditions, the price of maize recorded an increase of 26% between April and May 2011 in Bolgatanga (Figure 2). During this same period, Bawku and Navrongo recorded slight increases of 4.3% and 4.4% respectively while a significant increase of 16% was recorded in Zebilla. The prevailing maize prices are higher than their level for May 2010 and the five-year average in Bolgatanga by 26% and 47% respectively. Though now stable, the nominal price of maize has seen an increase of 34.6% in Bolgatanga since January 2011. However, the real price of maize at ₦11.3 is comparable to the ₦13.3 for May 2008 which was a difficult period following the floods and dry spells of the 2007 growing season. Thus, communities in this region are generally seriously impacted by the rising food prices which increase vulnerability to further market shocks due to their inability to acquire inputs and invest adequate time on their own fields. The current prices are likely to increase further during the peak of the season, worsening food access for the poor, and potentially increasing rates of malnutrition among children and pregnant women.

Figure 2. Price of Maize in Bolgatanga
Source: MoFA/SRID

3.3 Upper West Region
Over the next three months, decreasing food availability and increasing staple cereal prices will reduce poor households’ access to food in the western stretch of the region. The price of maize was generally stable in Tumu and Wa during the months of April and May. The price was however 57.6% and 23.5% higher than the five-year in Tumu and Wa respectively (Figure 3). The current price trend for maize is different from the previous year, when it experienced a downward slide between January and May 2011. The apparent fluctuation in prices reflect some anxiety or pressure on available supplies due to high demand for staples. As a result, maize prices are 61.5% above its level for the previous year with prices. The price of millet also followed a similar pattern remaining stable between April and May and are 20.5% and 23.8% higher than the four-year average in Tumu and Wa.
In Lawra market, nominal wholesale price of sorghum was stable between April and May 2011. However, prices in May were 85% higher than the five-year average and 22% higher than the previous year. In Wa market, the price of cowpea is above the previous year and the five-year average by 32.7% and 85% respectively. Much of the cowpea available in the market is imported from Burkina and as a result declining stocks will provide further impetus for price increase until newly harvested cowpea begins to trickle in by mid July.

4.0 Health and Nutrition

The nutritional status of selected children under two (2) years of age in the Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions were assessed using the weight-for-age (WFA) indicator. Data was gathered from nineteen (19) selected health institutions in twelve (12) districts close to the respective Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) sentinel sites in the three northern regions.

The Information was gathered during growth monitoring sessions carried out by the Ghana Health Service (GHS) at outreach points of these health centres. The data is therefore from individuals who are patronizing children health services so there is an element of self-targeting. The percentages of these underweight children examined (95% CI) shows the combined effects of acute and chronic malnutrition, as shown by the figure 4 - which compares the nutritional status of children in May from 2007 to 2011;

4.1 Observation

Generally, the Upper East and Northern Regions have consistent high levels of malnutrition as compared to that of the Upper West Region. However, the trend of malnutrition for the Upper East and Upper West regions shows a decline in May 2011, but that of the Northern Region depicts an increase which needs close monitoring as we move towards the peak of the lean season.