The regional meeting on the Agricultural and Food prospects in the Sahel and in West Africa (PREGEC) organized by CILSS, was held in Dakar from 4 to 6 September, 2012. The meeting confirmed that the 2012/2013 growing season witnessed a regular start. Early and abundant rains were well distributed in time and space in most countries. Compared to last year and to the 30-year average, the cumulative sum of differences was largely positive. As of 30 August, however, rainfall deficits were observed when compared to the average of the past 30 years in the northwest of Nigeria but had no major impact on the progress of the growing season.

Rainfall was above average, which also caused flooding (see below). This allowed a correct filling of groundwater and rivers (especially Senegal, Niger, and Chad Lake) and should allow good off-cycle crop opportunities.

Given the rainfall data, the vegetative stages and the weather forecast by the end of the growing season, overall harvest prospects are good in the region. Losses related to the flooding of plots of land and possible damages caused by crop enemies remain potential risk factors to be taken into consideration.

The cereal production in the Sahel region and West Africa for the 2012-2013 growing season is expected to be in the range of 57 to 64 million tons, a 5 to 17 percent increase compared to last year. These figures are indicative and must be confirmed by the results of the agricultural survey which will be available in October 2012 (PREGEC).

Given the likelihood for a normal end to the growing season with well distributed rains in time and space, coarse grain yields should be above or well above the 1971-2000 average in most agricultural areas except in Tillabéri and northern Tahoua (Niger), and in eastern Biltine (Chad), where yields could be below the 30-year average (due to a slight rainfall deficit) (figure 1).

Objective: Within the framework of the monthly meetings of the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group for West Africa, it has been agreed that, in a humanitarian perspective, WFP and FAO provide the group with highlights on the food security situation of the previous month. This document describes key elements developed during this meeting.
Uneven pastoral situation

With the abundant rains in July and August, a good start to the pasture regeneration has been observed. However, due to long dry spell, the pasture regeneration has been delayed in Niger (Tahoua, Dosso, Tillabéry and Diffa), Burkina Faso (East, Central East and in the Sahel), Mali (border areas with Niger), Senegal (northern Matam and eastern Louga) and Mauritania (Assaba, Guidimakha and Hodh Ech Gharbi) (figure 2).

This situation is due to an inadequate rainfall pattern for a normal growth of the vegetation (lack of rains or a long dry spell) and could result in biomass deficits. At the same time, an above-average growth of vegetation has been observed in central Niger (Maradi and Zinder), central Mali, the Sahel belt of Chad, eastern Senegal and central Mauritania. The situation remains normal in other areas (source: Agrhymet August 2012).

Flooding in West Africa

Abundant rainfall recorded in the principal basins in the Sahel caused flooding in the region since the end of July. In August, warning thresholds have been exceeded in most monitored stations of Senegal, Niger, Volta and Chari and on their tributaries (Agrhymet).

According to data collected (15 September), more than one and a half million people were affected by heavy rains across West and Central Africa in July and August 2012. Niger, Chad, Senegal and Nigeria together account for more than 90 percent of those affected.

Agricultural lands were damaged but the impact of flooding on households should be further assessed (1).

In Nigeria, a majority of states has been affected by flooding between July and October. Floods are due to torrential rains and the opening of Lagdo dam in Cameroon and Jebba and Kainji hydroelectric power dams in the state of Niger, in Nigeria. Floods would have affected hundreds of thousands, destroyed infrastructures (houses, schools, health centers, roads, bridges), fields, fish ponds and silos.

(1) According to Monsey district authorities, 3000 ha have been flooded in northern Benin and the harvest is likely to be lost. In Agadez, 289 market gardens were destroyed (source: OCHA).
Locust situation: WARNING: swarms forming in the Sahel

Desert Locust swarms are present in Chad and should start forming shortly in Niger and Mali. The swarms are expected to move towards North-West Africa in the coming weeks. Although unusually favourable ecological conditions allowed two generations of breeding this summer, the rains have ended and vegetation is drying out. This will cause locusts to concentrate and group in those areas that are still green in the Sahel and form hopper bands and swarms during the remainder of October and in November.

In Chad, immature swarms and hopper bands are present in the northeast near Fada where control operations are in progress. Hopper bands and swarms have also been reported further west near Kouba Oulanga. In Niger, hoppers and adults are forming groups on the Tamesna Plains and in the Air Mountains. In Mali, the situation is less clear in the north due to the prevailing insecurity but it is likely to be similar to the current situation in Niger and Chad. In Mauritania, hoppers and adults are forming groups in the northwest near Akjoujt and in the centre near Tidjikja; control teams treated 250 ha during the past week.

Once the swarms form, they are expected to migrate north and west from Chad, Mali and Niger and arrive in western and central Libya, southern and central Algeria, and northwestern Mauritania during the second half of October. There is also a risk that a few swarms could move towards cropping areas in central and western Mali.

All countries in the region should be on high alert from now onwards. In Chad, Mali and Niger, all efforts should continue to maintain and expand survey and control operations in the infested areas.

Trends on the international markets

The FAO Food Price Index averaged 216 points in September 2012, up 3 points (1.4 percent) from August. Following two months of stability, the index rose slightly, mostly on strengthening dairy and meat prices and more contained increases for cereals. Prices of sugar and oils decreased.

The FAO Cereal Price Index averaged 263 points in September, up 3 points (1 percent) from August, as gains in wheat and rice offset a decline in maize. At this level, the FAO Cereal Price Index is 7 percent higher than in the corresponding period last year but still 4 percent below the peak of 274 points registered in April 2008. While shrinking maize export availabilities and high maize prices have been leading cereal markets in recent months, tightening wheat supplies have also become a concern. Nonetheless, international wheat prices fell towards the second half of the month, following the announcement by the Russian Federation that it would not impose restrictions on exports.

Drawing from the lessons learnt after the 2008 crisis, countries concerned by these markets could improve their political decision-making, so as to ease inter-state trade. Argentina’s Minister of Agriculture confirmed that the country will export an additional 2.75 million tons of maize, which may help to open up maize trade on the international market (source: FAO/Media Centre, 2012).
Regional markets: high grain prices in the Sahel despite a downward or stable trend in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

In Burkina Faso, Niger and central and southern Mali, grain prices decreased in September compared to August 2012 but remain high. This decrease follows the seasonal patterns (grain prices decrease as harvest approaches). Figure 9 shows a decrease in millet prices in Ouagadougou, Bamako and Niamey. However, compared to 2011 and the 5-year average (in Niger) or the 4-year average (in Burkina Faso and Mali), grain prices remain at high levels.

In Niger, millet increased by 49% to 82%, sorghum increased by 28% to 62% and maize increased by 15% to 30% compared to the 5-year average. Millet increased by 55% to 96% with the most significant rise in Maradi compared to September 2011.

In Burkina Faso, millet increased by 48% to 54%, sorghum increased by 30% to 39% and maize increased by 9% to 38% compared to the 5-year average. Millet increased by 57% to 83% with the most significant rise in Maradi compared to September 2011.

Increases in coarse grain prices were also observed in central and southern Mali. Millet increased by 31% to 74%, sorghum increased by 40% to 55% and maize increased by 16% to 43% compared to the 4-year average. Millet increased by 47% to 104% compared to September 2011 with the most significant rise in Bamako.

Imported rice remains stable in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

In Mauritania, wheat prices remained stable in Nouakchott compared to August 2012, but increased by 25% compared to the 3-year average.

Regarding livestock and terms of trade in the Sahel, August was characterized by a good supply of livestock. Prices improved due to the good physical health of livestock and the strong demand before Tabaski. In Bandiagara (Mali), a sheep costs 47,750 FCFA as against 35,000 FCFA (3-year average). Though grain prices remain high, the terms of trade (livestock/gain) improved for herders in August 2012, compared to July, and improved food access for households was also recorded.

In Abalak (Niger), a household will obtain 83kg of millet by selling a goat, as compared to 42kg a month ago. By contrast, terms of trade remain unfavorable for herders compared to the 5-year average.

In Bandiagara (Mali), a herder will obtain 210kg of millet by selling a sheep as compared to 180kg a month ago. These terms of trade also remain unfavorable to herders compared to the 3-year average (+2%).

In Senegal, only the terms of trade for goat/imported rice slightly improved in August due to the decrease of imported rice (-3% compared to July) and the increase in the price of goats. By contrast, the purchasing power of cattle and sheep herders further deteriorated (-4% and -3%, respectively) due to the decrease of prices compared to July. The seasonal scarcity of pasture may have also had an impact on livestock health and their market value.

In August, terms of trade improved in some places in the Sahel, compared to July 2012, following seasonal patterns in livestock prices.

Figure 6: Millet price trend in the Sahel

Source: GIEWS
Impact on food security

In Niger, preliminary results of the national SMART (Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions) nutrition survey conducted in July-August 2012 indicate that nutritional status of children under 5 years is of concern. Although the chronic malnutrition rate decreased by 9% (from 51% to 42%) compared to June 2011, global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate increased from 12.3% in June 2011 to 14.8% in 2012. This rate is very close to the emergency threshold of 15% determined by the World Health Organization (WHO). Four regions are above this emergency threshold: Zinder (15.9%), Maradi (16.2%), Tillabéri (16.6%) and Diffa (16.7%). The severe acute malnutrition rate increased from 1.9% in June 2011 to 3% in 2012 (this rate was at 3.2% in 2010, considered to be a very difficult year for food and nutrition security).

This situation calls out not only to government but also to technical and financial partners. Prevention and treatment of malnutrition should be further strengthened and diversified. These strategies will be supported by direct nutritional actions (blanket feeding) and a large awareness campaign to change behaviour of mothers and the general population.

In Kayes (Mali), the preliminary results of the rapid assessment conducted by Save The Children in August 2012 indicate that 1/food stocks are almost depleted, 2/staple food prices remain high, 3/a massive exodus of young people is observed, 4/livestock is sold (especially draught animal) to meet the households needs, 5/the impoverishment of households is observed: the proportion of poor and very poor increased from 63% (HEA Diema, March 2012) to 82% (August 2012).

In Mali, the preliminary results of the EFSA survey (source: WFP) conducted in July indicate that grain prices (millet and imported rice) remain high compared to the 5-year average. This situation is due to the recent drought and the disruption of trade flows (from the socio-political crisis in the North). Northern regions and Kayes are the most affected by these high grain prices. Given the difficulty to access Timbuktu which is very far from main trade channels, this area is particularly affected.

In Gao and Kidal, imported rice decreased by 6% and 20%, respectively, in August 2012 compared to a month ago. In Gao and Kidal, food supplies come from Algeria and include wheat flour, pastas, milk in powder and other manufactured goods. For people in Haussa (around Gao), these products are more likely to match their food habits.

Due to geographical reasons and different food habits in rural areas, this strategy (trade flows from Algeria) is less clear/obvious in Timbuktu.

The disruption of income generating activities (which caused a decrease in income and liquidity) is one of the main challenges in northern Mali. This situation affected the volume of trade (since customers purchase in smaller quantity, stock turnover increased by 4-5 days to 2-3 weeks). Due to scarce liquidity, an increase in barter transactions has been observed (an option rarely used in practice). Barter is more commonly used in rural areas where traders exchange their goods for livestock or other items.

The bad pastoral situation of the 2011-2012 growing season contributed to the decrease in purchasing power for agricultural households. In August 2012, terms of trade decreased by 55% in Gao and 58% in Kidal and Timbuktu, compared to the 5-year average.

In Burkina Faso, a joint Food Security Assessment FAO-FEWS NET is underway. This survey will cover the entire country and 3,900 households will be interviewed in 45 districts. This assessment is based on the Direction Générale de la Promotion de l’Economie Rurale (DGPER) mechanism. The results will be made available by late October-early November and should be of interest for main actors of food security.
Recommendations for the regional food security and nutrition working group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support the joint mission (CILSS/FAO/FEWS NET/WFP/Governments) for the monitoring of the 2012-2013 growing season</td>
<td>Reach a consensus on the assessment of the harvests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support urgently the regional programme to combat locust infestations and strengthen national plans (Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad)</td>
<td>Increase efficiency of locust control operations (monitoring, control, logistic, equipment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closely monitor the wheat and the flour prices in Mauritania</td>
<td>Partners can make recommendations to decision-makers and mitigate the impact of a potential price increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closely monitor the food and nutrition security in the Sahel and especially in northern Mali</td>
<td>Food and nutrition response scenarios are developed to improve preparedness</td>
</tr>
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Dear readers,

Since 2008, FAO and WFP have been proposing this joint note on food security and humanitarian implications in West Africa. In 2011, we have conducted a satisfaction survey to collect readers’ feedback on this note. This allowed us to improve the design and the dissemination of this note.

Your feedback through the new online questionnaire would help us to further improve our product! The responses are anonymous.

http://41.188.113.80/kmsdb/index.php?sid=91199&lang=en

Thanks in advance for your participation!
Conclusions

△ The good crop prospects in the Sahel will improve the food security for producers, and, should the retail prices decrease, purchasing power could improve for households relying on markets for their food. However, poor and very poor households representing over 20% of the population and who do not depend on agricultural production for their food, will probably remain very vulnerable.

△ Moreover, the locust threat remains in Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. There are also some areas in the Sahel where cereal production is expected to be low. The situation is not expected to improve for poor households that did not have access to agricultural assistance, and these households could even face early food insecurity situations in 2013. Therefore, these households are still in need of humanitarian assistance.

Mark your calendars!

> Joint missions CILSS/FAO/FEWS NET/WFP/Government to assess the harvests:
  Coastal Countries: from 24 September to 6 October 2012
  CILSS Countries: from 28 October to 9 November 2012

> Workshop on resilience (FAO, OCHA, WFP, UNDP and UNICEF): from 9 to 11 October 2012