



PRESS RELEASE

FOOD AND NUTRITION SITUATION AND AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

Good prospects for the 2013 rainy season in a context of high cereal prices and worries about the nutritional situation

1. The restricted meeting of the regional food crisis prevention and management mechanism in the Sahel and West Africa (PREGEC) was held from 17 to 19 June 2013 in Cotonou, Benin. At the end of the meeting, the regional and international information systems on food and nutrition security made the following observations:
2. The good harvests at the end of the 2012-2013 cropping season and off-season have been confirmed and helped maintain a satisfactory level of food stocks in the markets and at producer household level.
3. Insecurity in northern Nigeria and northern Mali and the presence of displaced persons and refugees (from Mali and Nigeria) in the region could result in a more rapid depletion of stocks for host families in the host countries; but also more localized pressure of demand on cereal markets. Agricultural product prices, including cereals, remain high in most markets particularly in the Eastern Basin where they are between 30-50% above the last five-year average for millet, sorghum and maize; and in parts of the Western Basin (10-24%) compared to the five-year average). On the other side, rice prices have remained stable. As a result, the high coarse cereal prices could affect food access for the majority of poor households who depend on markets to cover most of their food needs.
4. Trade is being done without any significant barrier and is even enhanced, from the Central Basin to the Eastern Basin, thanks to good supplies from Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. However, a disruption of the functioning of markets is seen in Nigeria due to poor crop production in 2012 and civil unrest.
5. Livestock prices are sustained thanks to the demand from the coastal countries and good availability of residual pasture. The terms of trade (livestock/cereals) remain favourable to breeders, but could deteriorate in July following a rise in cereal prices.
6. The nutritional situation still remains a concern in the region. There is a continuing high prevalence of acute malnutrition and an upward trend in admissions, at times higher than expected and close to the 2012 levels, particularly in Niger, Mali, Chad and Nigeria. This reflects an increased vulnerability of the poorest households who continue to face challenges of food access, limited access to basic services and erosion of their livelihoods.
7. In response to the consequences of food and nutrition insecurity that affected over 10 million people (*PREGEC, March 2013*), efforts are being made by some countries, especially Niger and Burkina Faso, despite financing gaps registered for the implementation of the annual assistance plan for vulnerable populations.

8. The seasonal climate forecasts (May-October 2013) made by CILSS and ACMAD indicate a high probability of having rainfall totals equivalent to above normal (1981/2010). In terms of hydrological forecasts, water flows equivalent to above normal are expected in all river basins in the region, plus Chad and Cameroon. These are good agro-pastoral prospects for the region.
9. Concerning the preparation of the 2013-2014 agro-pastoral season, a normal start of its installation can be observed in the region, but a slow start in the establishment of inputs (seeds, fertilizers) in the countries.
10. The locust situation is now calm. But, the desert locust swarms present in the outbreak areas in southern Maghreb could migrate to the summer breeding areas in the north of the Sahel countries; isolated individuals and larvae are already present in the Air Mountains in Niger. This situation deserves special attention at the beginning of this season.

At the end of its deliberations, the meeting recommends:

To the countries to:

- Take immediate action to support the vulnerable populations who are facing a difficult lean period;
- Develop, in a participatory and systematic manner, contingency and support plans at the State level to better anticipate and prepare interventions in the field of food and nutrition security and other disaster risks;
- Strengthen actions for the prevention and care of acute malnutrition;
- Ensure availability, in time, of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers);
- Take advantage of the expected abundant rainfall and floods to prepare, as soon as possible, programmes to support recessional and off-season cropping;
- Monitor river levels in order to manage possible floods in the region;
- Keep watch on monitoring locusts in the front line countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad).

Regional Food Security Information Systems (CILSS, FAO, WFP, FEWS NET)

- Support countries in developing and monitoring the implementation of response plans to food and nutrition crises and other disaster risks;
- Monitor the 2013-2014 agro-pastoral season;
- Strengthen monitoring of markets and cross-border trade flows, particularly in the Central and Eastern Basins;
- Provide strategic watch for monitoring floods and desert locusts.

Done in Cotonou, 19 June 2013

The Meeting