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.

Key Points

- Sowing activities are affected by the late start of the rainy season as well as dry spells that occurred in localized areas in the region.
- Monthly cereal prices remained relatively stable throughout the region, although some seasonal price increases were observed and price levels were elevated in areas affected by conflicts and large population displacements.
- The lean season is ongoing in the region, affecting pastoralists, poor and very poor households, refugees, IDPs and host populations.

The 2014/2015 agricultural campaign is marked by a late start of the rainy season, particularly in Nigeria and in Cameroon, and by dry spells that occurred subsequent to sowing activities in localized areas in Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

The lean season has started for most of rural households. This year is particularly difficult for households in some areas in Mauritania and Niger due to the early depletion of food stocks of households that depend on markets for their food consumption. Another reason for the deterioration of the food security situation in the region is the civil unrest which still prevails in the Central African Republic, northern Nigeria and northern Mali, causing people to flee their homes and countries.

In the three basins, commercial trade flows of agricultural commodities have functioned well between April and June 2014, as agricultural surpluses of the main exporting countries (Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria) reached food deficit areas in the Sahel region. The markets are well supplied due to destocking activities by traders, which have contributed to ease regional flows. However, price levels in May were more than 15 percent above their five year averages in northern Mali, Chad, Nouakchott in Mauritania and along the border between Niger and Nigeria. These elevated price levels will limit food access of poor and very poor households.

Recommendations for regional partners

→ Strengthen food security monitoring in countries affected by an early lean season, especially in Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Senegal.
→ Strengthen the monitoring of the 2014-2015 agricultural season in areas where the rainy season has started and where dry spells after sowing activities have occurred.
→ Advocate for the timely funding of priority actions of the Sahel Humanitarian Appeal in preparation of the main agricultural season and the lean period.
→ Monitor the population displacements from C.A.R., Nigeria and northern Mali.
The rainy season has started in most of the region. The meeting of the Regional System for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises (PREGEC) that was held in Ndjama (Chad) from 18 to 19 June 2014 indicated an early start of the agricultural campaign in some areas of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger.

By contrast, in most of the Sudano-Sahelian and Sudanian zones, particularly in Nigeria and Cameroon, delays on sowing were observed. Dry spells have resulted in reseeding in some locations, mostly in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger (Source: avis PREGEC).

The cumulative rainfall received by 30 June is above average in the south of Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, enabling a smooth start of the main agricultural season. In contrast, Nigeria and parts of Cameroon are experiencing a rainfall deficit compared to the average of the last thirty years that may lead to delayed sowing (source: NOAA).

The first rains have instigated the 2014 agricultural season with the preparation of plots, the transport of organic manure and the early sowing of millet. In Niger, weeding is ongoing in some areas but the lack of water is stunting sprout development.

The pastoral lean season continues in most countries of the Sahel. In the north of Niger, livestock are in a poor physical condition due to the lack of pasture, resulting in a drastic drop in prices for small animals on the market. The same situation is also observed in the north of Mali, with the movement of livestock to grazing areas in the center and south of the country. However, an early regeneration of vegetation and the refill of some temporary water points are observed in areas receiving large amounts of rainfall. (source: Afrique verte)

Displacement situation in the region

Population displacements persist due to conflicts and insecurity in C.A.R. and Nigeria

Violence in Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic continue to cause significant displacement of people suffering from a severe degradation of their food and nutrition security.

Mali: A multi-sectoral assessment conducted between 27 and 30 May 2014 by humanitarian actors confirmed the displacement of 2,041 households, a total of 14,287 people, in all five areas assessed around Kidal and Tessalit. (source: OCHA)

Chad: The arrival of people from the Central African Republic into Chad continues, despite the border closure between the two countries. 200 people arrived at Kouno, Chari Baguirmi region, between 16 May and 7 June in extremely vulnerable conditions. Their presence puts additional pressure on the already scarce local resources. The rates of acute malnutrition in transit sites and entry points are above the emergency threshold (WFP). A total of 110,000 people have fled the Central African Republic since December 2013 (source: OCHA).

In Nigeria, in May 2014, OCHA coordinated a mission to six states in the northeast of the country (Borno, Yobe, Taraba Adamawa, Gombe and Bauchi). Preliminary results show that 15.5 million people are affected by conflict and natural disasters and about 646,693 people have moved from Borno, Yobe and northern Adamawa to the neighboring states of Taraba, Gombe and Bauchi. Borno is the most affected State with over 258,000 displaced people, including 100,000 in the capital Maiduguri.

The displaced are often hosted by poor communities, adding an extra burden on already limited resources and food stocks. The mission has reported that the number of displaced people is higher in most States than previously reported.
Trends on international markets

Food prices fall for the second consecutive month

Food prices continue their downward trend since March, as a result of lower prices for dairy products, cereals and vegetable oil. However, sugar prices rose sharply in May, while those of meat remained stable. The FAO Food Price Index was 1.2 percent down compared to April 2014 and 3.2 percent down compared to May 2013.

![Figure 2: FAO Food Price Index](source: FAO)

The FAO Cereal Price Index fell by 1.2 per cent in April and by 13 percent compared to last year. The decline in May was mostly triggered by maize prices, which fell in response to favorable growing conditions and good supply prospects in 2014/15. Wheat prices fell during the month of May, following the improvement of weather conditions in the United States and the restart of trade with Ukraine.

Since the end of May, international rice prices are on the rise due to a dampened production outlook in Asia and an increase in import demand. The exportable supply, even if decreasing slightly, is still enough to meet the world demand. (source: Internice)

The impact of international markets on the price of imported cereals (rice, wheat and maize) in West Africa and the Sahel is currently limited.

Trends on West African markets

Monthly price stability with seasonal increases in localized areas

In the three West African trade basins, commercial trade flows of agricultural commodities have functioned well between April and June 2014, as agriculture surpluses of the main exporting countries (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Nigeria) reached food deficit areas in the Sahel region. Local markets were regularly supplied, due to destocking activities by traders aiming to profit from relatively elevated cereal prices (millet and sorghum) and by additional producer sales to finance their agricultural inputs for the 2014/15 agricultural season. These additional supply sources have helped to stabilize regional trade flows.

Moreover, despite a satisfactory availability of staple foods on local markets and an overall price stability, monthly prices are beginning their seasonal increase at the start of the lean season in some local markets in the central and eastern trade basins (Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso). In the eastern trade basin, elevated price levels particularly affect communities confronted with civil unrest in northern Nigeria as well as those that host IDPs in southern Chad and Niger.

Cassava prices in Southern Chad, for example, increased significantly due to a combined effect of disrupted trade flows and the arrival of refugees from the Central African Republic. The commercial exchange between Chad and its neighboring countries, particularly C.A.R. and Nigeria, is limited due to a precarious security situation in these countries.

For maize, the most heavily traded cereal throughout the region, prices in May 2014 were well below their five-year averages (2009 – 2013) in most parts of the region. The prices of millet and sorghum are approaching their five-year averages and are equivalent or lower in several markets in Burkina Faso and Niger.

However, high price levels for millet and sorghum (more than 15 percent above their five-year averages) were observed in northern Mali, Chad and also along the border between Niger and Nigeria. This could further limit food access for poor and very poor households. (Source: Afrique Verte, CILSS, WFP)

End of June 2014, the value of the Nigerian Naira against the CFA franc is about 3 percent below the level of the same period in 2013 (compared to 8 percent at the end of May). An increase in the exchange rate naira / FCFA as it was observed over the past three months (+3 percent), could adversely affect trade flows to Niger and Chad, with negative effects on cereal availability during the lean season. (Source: Afrique Verte, CILSS, WFP)

In Ghana, the government has reintroduced fuel subsidies in April 2014. It is possible that the decision was taken to protect Ghanaians of elevated fuel costs, given that inflation stood at 14.8 percent in May 2014 and the currency, the cedi, depreciated by almost 25 percent compared with the dollar this year.
The average annual inflation rate of the group ‘food and non-alcoholic beverages’ stood at 8 percent in May, while the ‘cereals and cereal products’ sub-group reached an annual inflation rate of 9.1 percent. This represents an increase of one percent from April for both of these two categories. (Source: Ghana Statistical Service, WFP). This situation contributes to diminishing the purchasing power of urban and rural households that are net food buyers and risks to threaten the food security of the most vulnerable.

Impact on Food Security

A particularly difficult lean season in parts of Mauritania and Niger

In Burkina Faso, cereal availability at market and household level is satisfactory. Poor and very poor households, however, continue to face difficulties in accessing food during the lean season. In southern and central Mali, the food security situation is satisfactory, despite continuously decreasing household food stocks. However, in the northern regions, the situation remains precarious due to the pastoralist lean season (source: Afrique Verte).

In Mauritania, the ongoing lean season is reducing food access for poor populations that are still bearing the consequences of previous crises. Coping strategies such as borrowing to guarantee food access are most common in the agropastoral, rainfed-farming and Senegal River Valley zones.

In Niger, a lean period marked by the agricultural production deficit in 2013 puts poor and very poor households in a difficult food security situation, particularly in the regions of Tillabery, Tahoua, Zinder and Diffa. Moreover, the increasing arrivals of new refugees in the regions of Diffa and Tahoua, in the context of a deteriorating security environment in northern Nigeria and northern Mali, is putting additional pressure on the already precarious food security situation of host families, particularly in Diffa (source: OCHA, Afrique Verte).
Critical food security situation for C.A.R. refugees in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the preliminary results of a community level study on the mortality and malnutrition situation, carried out by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in April and May 2014, confirmed the alarming nutritional situation of C.A.R refugees in eastern Cameroon. In the refugee camps of Gado Badzere and Gbiti, the mortality rate surpasses the emergency threshold for both the overall mortality rate and the specific mortality among children under five. High rates of global acute malnutrition were recorded for children in Gado Badzere (44.9 percent) and Gbiti (41.5 percent) with respectively 9.3 percent and 15.7 percent of children affected by severe acute malnutrition in these camps. Comprehensive screenings that were conducted in the context of a UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP inter-agency mission from 2 to 7 June 2014 in Lolo, Gbiti, Gado and Borgop also confirm this alarming nutritional situation of displaced children from C.A.R. In the same area, a needs assessment mission was conducted by CARE during the period from 28 April to 6 May 2014. The mission results indicate food price increases in border markets as well as zoo sanitary risks for cameroonian livestock, due to the influx of livestock with weak sanitary coverage belonging to C.A.R. refugees. The report also draws attention to the failure of current assistance to take account of refugees that are living in host families who are also in a precarious food security situation.

Mark your calendars!

- Training on the Cadre harmonisé (CH) in Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau: 25 – 29 August
- PREGEC Banjul (Gambia): 15-20 September
- Joint crop harvest assessment missions:
  - Gulf of Guinea countries (Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo): 22-26 September
  - Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad): 27 – 31 October
- CH : analysis workshop:
  - Gulf of Guinea countries (Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo): 29 September – 3 October
  - Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Cap Vert, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad): 3-7 November
- CH regional analysis workshop (Senegal): 13- 15 November
- PREGEC Dakar (Senegal): 18 – 20 November

Information on food security in West Africa

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