

FOOD SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL



March 2012

Key points

- ▽ **Sahel Alert: Alarming lack of funds to meet ongoing food and nutrition crisis**
- ▽ The ongoing political instability in Mali could compromise the effectiveness of the response to food and nutrition crisis
- ▽ The pastoral situation continues to deteriorate in most of the Sahel countries
- ▽ **Markets:** Grain prices are stable at high values in Niger while they are increasing in Burkina Faso and Mali

Agro pastoral situation - Regional meeting confirms fodder and grain shortages in the Sahel

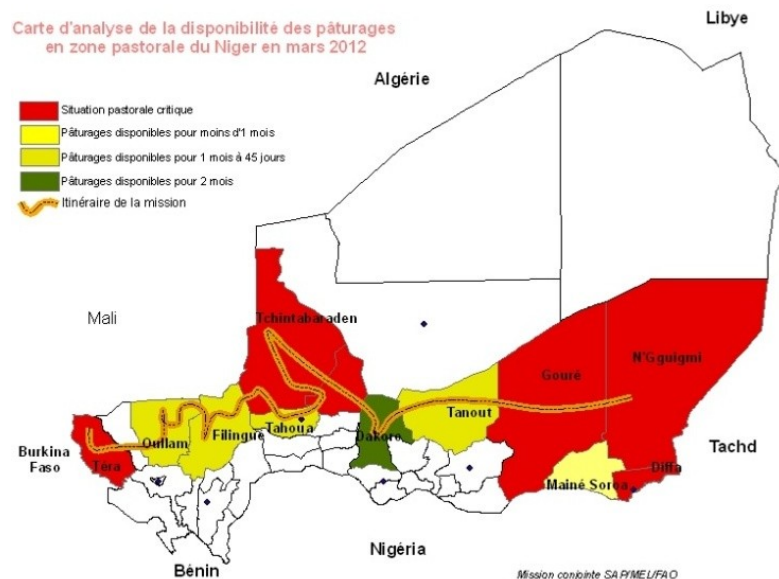
The meeting of the Regional consultation on food and nutrition situation in the Sahel and West Africa held 13-15 March 2012 in Abidjan confirmed that Sahel countries actually experience fodder and grain deficits. The revised cereal production is 16,424,000 tons. It was sharply down compared to last year (26%) and is 3% down compared to the five-year average. Almost all CILSS countries experience a 9% up to 56% decline in cereal production compared to 2010. This year's cereal production declines are highest in the Gambia (56%), Chad (49%), Senegal (36%), Niger (31%), Mauritania (34%) and Burkina Faso (20%).

March is marked by the continued cultivation of off-season crops around still available water sources and marketing of productions. Rice cultivation in completely controlled system in Niger and potato growing in Mali continue along the Niger River. The pastoral situation remains difficult in many areas due to poor pasture development, the poor filling of water points and overgrazing. Physical condition of livestock described as "fair" at this time of the year begins to deteriorate especially in Timbuktu in Mali. Farmers continue to buy their livestock to acquire cereals.

In Mauritania, in the wilaya of Tagant, Assaba, Barkna and Hodh Gharbi some animals could not make the journey to reach pasture areas given their physiological weakness. In Guidimakha, 85% of animals from other wilaya –particularly calves- display

physiological weaknesses. The few pasture areas are overgrazed by herds from diverse backgrounds.

Figure 1 : Availability of pasture in pastoral areas in Niger



Sources : SAP, Ministry of Livestock, FAO

In Niger, the Early Warning System in collaboration with the Ministry of Livestock and FAO conducted in March 2012 a mission in the pastoral zone: the pastoral situation is particularly difficult in the whole northern part of the Tillabéri region except for a few pockets around Sinégoder and western Sanam;

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throughout the district of Tchintabaradene, throughout the northern area of Abalak in the districts of Tanout and Tenhya in the department of Tanout Tesker and in Goure and almost the entire Diffa region. Fodder is virtually inexistent in nearly 80% of the grazing zone where available pasture is below 50kg / ha. The physical condition of livestock in these areas is gradually deteriorating with the appearance of highly visible under-nourishment signs among animals.

The Desert Locust situation remains calm in the sub-region, there is no locust reported. However, resurgence was reported in February in the southwest Libya near the Algerian border, following the rains in October 2011 and a not detected reproduction at the end of the year. In northern Niger, scattered adults are likely swarming in the mountains in Air and are expected to move to the south of Algeria during March. Monitoring the locust situation in northern Mali and Niger is hampered by the insecurity currently prevailing there.

Malian crisis : over 206,000 displaced persons

The conflict in Mali continues according to OCHA which estimated the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) to 206 000 of whom nearly 113,000 left country to take refuge in Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Niger. The coup that overthrew the Government in March 22 raises concerns about how to monitor food and nutrition situation, tackle food crisis and cross-border flow of cereals, implement the response and control movements of population inside the Malian territory and towards neighboring countries.

The ongoing Malian crisis worsens food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel. On the one hand, the displaced are inherently vulnerable and often very poor. On the other hand, in the three main countries of destination, refugees arrive in areas that were already among the most vulnerable to food insecurity. The fate of the people dwelling in insecure areas is poorly documented and requires special attention.

According to the Billitale Maroobé network, the prevailing insecurity in the north has forced many herders to abandon their flocks, for fear of being killed in the armed conflicts involving the rebels and the Malian regular army. This conflict has led to a massive movement of livestock herders south of the country and in neighboring countries like Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso, which are themselves facing a food crisis. Thus, Tuareg breeders from Mali who joined Mauritania are considered as refugees and are against their will forced to settle. Such situation requires substantial food reserves, but also water and veterinary products to protect herders themselves, their families and their herds.

Such movements may cause substantial disruption in feeding livestock, high mortality of animals due to lack of water and higher health risk. Livestock markets can hardly come to life in such a context of uncertainty and lack of control over insecurity. Pastoral movements are disorganized and differ from herders' usual way of transhumance in most countries of West Africa. They are compelled to move toward areas where they have not developed social relations with local communities. If appropriate and consistent measures are not taken and implemented and due to the high concentration of transhumant herders from Niger in these areas, there is risk of witnessing deadly conflict between farmers and herders in Burkina Faso where a conflict erupted in 2008/2009 between Fulani pastoralists and Tuareg herders.



Malian refugees in Burkina Faso

Global food prices kept rising in February

At the international level, the FAO index of food prices was 215 points on average in February 2012, representing an increase of one percent compared to January 2012. This increase was mainly due to higher sugar, oil and cereal prices, while dairy product prices dropped slightly after a sharp rise in January.

The international cereal prices continue to rise except for rice. The international wheat prices have experienced the highest increase, followed by maize, while rice prices were generally trending down, which indicates an import demand generally weak and strong competition among exporters.

Figure 2 : FAO food price Index



Source : FAO

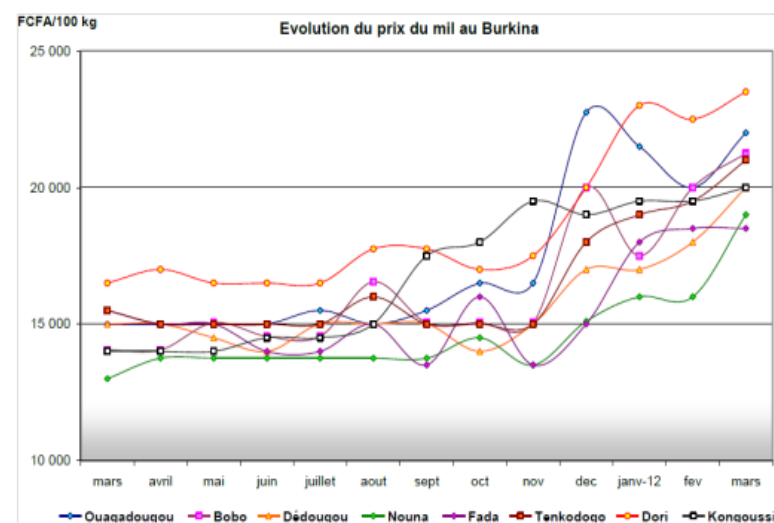
Grain prices in the Sahel: Stable in Niger, up in Mali and Burkina Faso

In March 2012, millet prices were on the rise in Mali and Burkina Faso (Figure 3) but remained stable in Niger, compared to last month. This increase of millet prices is explained by a high demand and low supply.

In Niger, even though cereal prices stabilized, the level remains higher compared to last year. In Agadez and Tillabéry, millet prices remain high and are set at over 25,000 FCFA/ 100kg bag. On the other hand, corn prices are experiencing a 5% drop in the markets of Dosso and Maradi compared to February 2012. To this may be added the improved market supply in southern Niger after socio-religious tensions relatively calmed down in Nigeria.

Figure 3 : Changes in millet price in Burkina Faso

Source : Afrique Verte



In Burkina Faso, however, grain prices experience an upward trend in almost all markets according to SIMSONAGESS. The most significant increases are observed in the Mouhoun market where millet and maize prices are 11% higher than last month. In Kossi also, prices of millet and sorghum rose respectively 19%

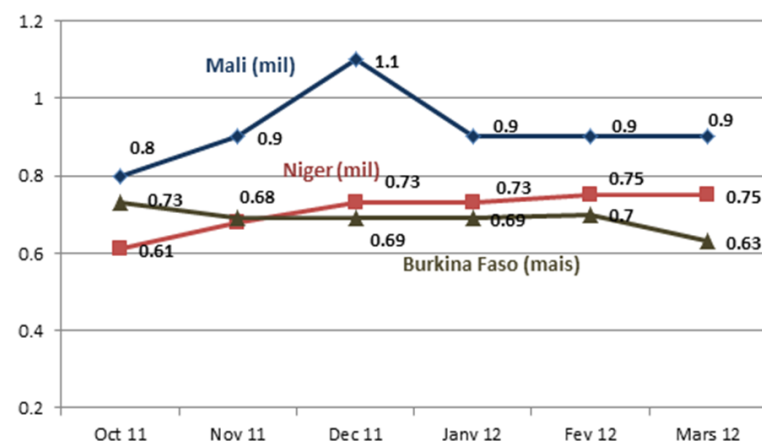
and 16% in a month. In Ouagadougou, the price of millet rose by 47% compared to the same period in 2011 and 54% compared to the average recorded over the past five years.

In Mali, grain prices experience a heterogeneous variation. In Mopti, millet and sorghum prices respectively rise by 7% and 5% while in Kayes, corn prices decline by 10% compared to the previous month.

Monitoring the 'alpha value' allows to understand the feasibility of cash programs. If the value exceeds 1, the cash and voucher programs become more expensive than food aid programs. Although a complete analysis requires understanding other functional factors of the markets, the following graph shows that the cash transfer programs in Mali and Niger are close to the 0.9 caution threshold. In addition, insecurity and market supply problems in these countries are undermining implementation of cash programs.

Figure 4 : Evolution of the alpha value in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali

Source: WFP



Impact on food security

As we approach the lean season, household food security continues to deteriorate in the Sahel. Up to March 2, 2012, the Government of Burkina Faso has officially declared that the country faced a food and nutrition crisis, and appealed to national and international solidarity to deal with it. One hundred and seventy municipalities are currently exposed to food insecurity.

In Gambia, the preliminary estimates of the Government and WFP indicate that approximately 605,000 people are currently food insecure. Among them 100,000 are children under 5 years. Out of the 39 rural districts in the Gambia, 19 are considered the most badly hit by crop failure, with a total population of 428,000, including 73,800 children under 5 years.

The terms of the grain/livestock trade are generally deteriorating in Gnagna and are relatively stable in Tapoa. The high rate of malnutrition which particularly affects children under 2 remains a concern in Chad (Action against Hunger Burkina Faso). Preliminary results of a recent survey on nutrition in the Sahelian belt of the country suggest that acute malnutrition has reached a "critical" level in six of the 11 regions surveyed, with a prevalence rate of over 10% - considered "serious" in all regions. The situation is expected to deteriorate if food security is not improving.

In Chad, the continued upward trend of prices recorded after the 2011 lean period has significantly deteriorated terms of livestock/grain trade in one year. Such deterioration is especially perceptible in the western Sahel (especially in Mao) and in Mongo (central Chad) and is mainly due to high grain prices. There is however a slight improvement over January 2012 due to lower grain prices rather than any improvement in the price of sheep in February. The Nigeria's crisis reduces livestock export opportunities and may create an oversupply in some local markets in the coming months. This might result in strong consequences on prices and difficulties for households owning livestock to access food in the coming months. (DPSA - WFP - SIMPA).

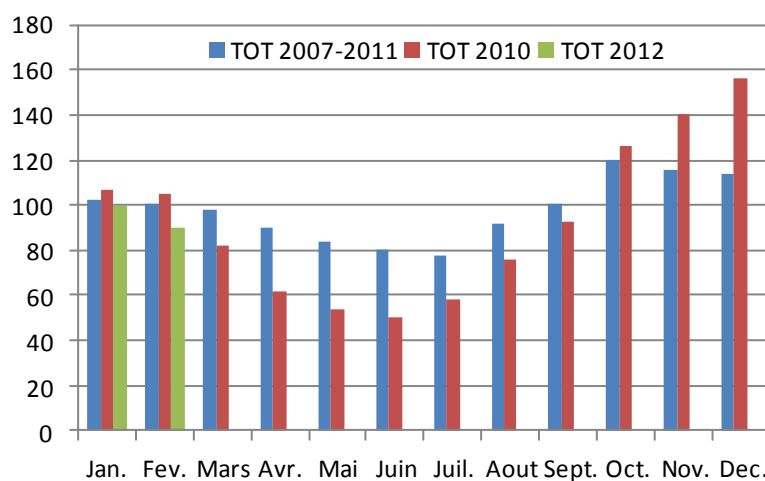
In Niger, it is expected that by April, month coinciding with the beginning of the lean period, 3.5 million people are severely food insecure and 2.9 million moderately food insecure. The Government of Niger has recently launched the first series of sales of subsidized grain prices, which contributes to an overall stabilization of food prices on local markets. However, vulnerable households continue to rely on negative coping mechanisms, notably migration and consumption poor quality food. In Tillabéri / Dosso and Zinder, it was reported that communities have already exhausted their stocks of grain. Families are in the process of adopting negative coping mechanisms, including migration of entire families to Libya and Nigeria, high child drop-out rates, and consumption of least favorite food. However, in areas where food-for-work programs

are implemented, it has been noted a lower rate of migration compared to other regions. An HEA survey conducted by Save the Children in collaboration with WFP is underway to better determine the impact of the crisis on livelihoods.

In its release on Food Security in the Agadez region issued on March 2012, Oxfam reported a very difficult situation for households in the area due to i) high grain prices, ii) moribund livestock markets (poor condition of animals resulting in poor sales and drop in prices), iii) negative impacts of the onion crisis (drop in income, indebtedness, non-payment of workers, resort to extreme coping strategies) and iv) massive arrival of entire families in makeshift camps from southern Niger suffering crop deficit. A certain number of families however expect to have good wheat, corn and potato crops in the coming weeks. Moreover, the good supply (millet, rice) in grain and imported products (from Algeria and the south of the country) combined with good capabilities of traders and economic operators could help curb deteriorating food insecurity in the coming months.

Levels of terms of trade (goat / millet and onion / millet) recorded in February 2012 are lower than those observed in 2010 and below the average recorded over the past five years. This reflects the increased inability of livestock sellers and breeders to acquire grain and cash crops to feed themselves.

Figure 5 : Abalak market: Change in terms of trade (TOT) a goat for a 1kg millet

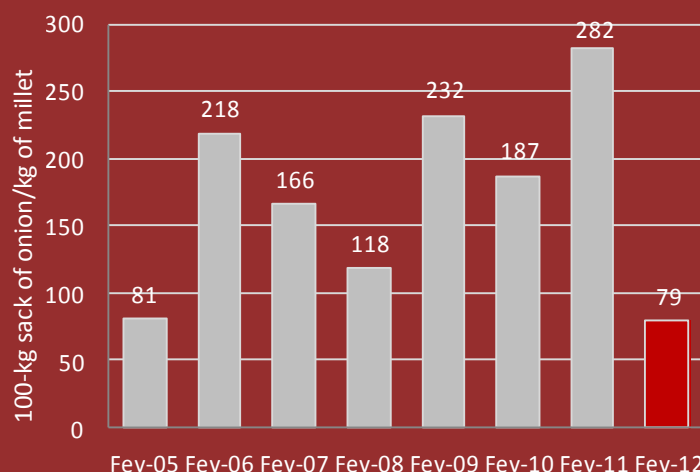


Source: Albichir, March 2012

Onion crisis in Niger and Chad

Onion (*Allium cepa*) is an irrigated cash crop widely practiced in Niger during the dry season and is one of the main exports. Its economic interest as well as its role in the fight against poverty and food insecurity in Niger is more than apparent. In areas experiencing grain shortages, incomes from onion production allow households to access food during the dry season. Unfortunately, the unexpected fall in prices of onion deteriorates terms of trade and renders access to food harder for people earning income from cash crops, especially those living in the regions of Agadez and Tahoua. In February 2012, the Agadez market has recorded a significant level of degradation-up to 72%- in TOT (onion / millet) compared to last month against - 60% compared to the five year average. Figure 5 shows that a producer selling a 100 kg sack of onion receives in return 79 kg of millet in February 2012, against 282 kg in the same period in 2011.

These terms of trade (onion / millet) are not favorable to breeders compared to the crisis years of 2005 and 2008. According to WFP, the drop in onion sales also affects Chad, since a fall in prices is recorded in market-gardening in eastern part of the country. As an illustration, in Koukou (Sila region), last year in the same period, a bag of 2.5 kg of onion was traded for FCFA 860 against FCFA 300 currently.



Recommendations for the regional food security and nutrition working group

Measures	Advantages
Updating the "Regional Strategy Paper - Sahel 2012" to respond to the crisis and support national preparatory humanitarian appeals. Budgeting for response by including project sheets	Donors are precisely informed about countries specific response needs
Supporting countries that have developed a contingency plan to implement their crisis response	Countries strengthen their response to adapt them to situations of food, nutrition crisis and to better livelihoods
Continuing to support affected countries in conducting food security and nutrition surveys among households	The number of households to benefit from assistance is specified and targeted for improved response

Conclusions

Grain prices in the Sahel continue to be at high values or on the rise, affecting purchasing power of vulnerable households.

Vulnerable households affected by poor agro-pastoral production during raining season and the lean period that cannot implement effective coping mechanisms are already facing food and nutrition insecurity and need to immediately access to assistance operations and have their livelihoods secured.



**Food security information
in West Africa and the Sahel**

www.wfp.org/food-security

www.fao.org/emergencies/en

www.fao.org/crisis/sahel/the-sahel-crisis/en/

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