Food security and humanitarian implications in West Africa and the Sahel

May 2012

Key points

- ∇ **Preparation for the 2012-2013 growing season : low donor response to the agricultural sector and humanitarian appeals in the region**
- ∇ **Crisis in Mali : household food security and situation of refugees and IDPs**
- ∇ **Grain prices in the Sahel : downward trend or stability in Burkina Faso and increases in Mali and Niger**

Growing season and locust situation

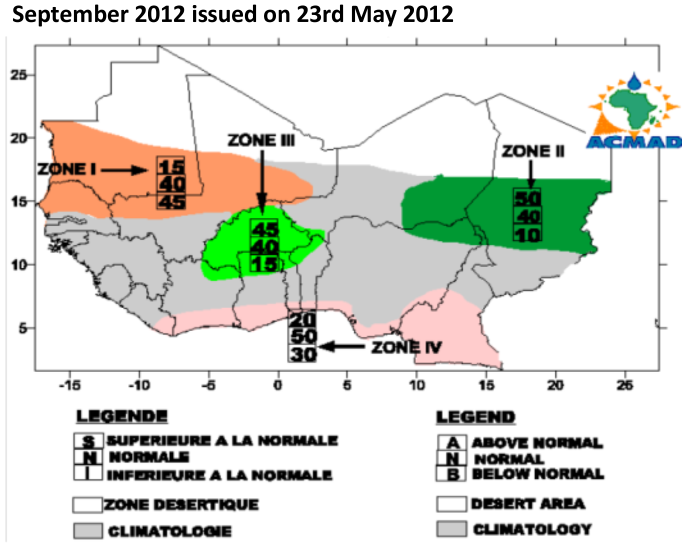
2011-2012 off-season activities are ending with the last harvests. In Niger, the harvest of irrigated paddy crops has started and is expected to increase food availability in recipient areas. In Agadez, wheat and maize harvests have started and will also increase food availability. In Mali, cotton marketing is ongoing and should generate income for producers (Afrique Verte). Preparations for the 2012-2013 planting season are currently being organized. The most vulnerable households living in areas at risk or already food insecure will need food assistance and livelihoods support, in particular with access to high-quality inputs (1).

The African Centre of Meteorological Applications for development (ACMAD) (figure 1) forecasts normal to below normal precipitation over the western Sahel (zone I: in the northern half of Senegal, central and western Mali and southern Mauritania) and above normal precipitation over the eastern Sahel (zone II: in Chad, eastern Niger and north-eastern Nigeria). Normal to above normal precipitation is forecasted in the centre of the region (zone III: Burkina Faso, northern Togo, Benin and Ghana). However, knowledge and analysis suggest a late onset of the rainy season in zone I and disruptions in the distribution of precipitation, which could lead to a reduction in yields.

(1) As of May 2012, in the Sahel, agricultural sector remained underfunded : 26% (FAO) and 17% (United Nations and NGO; sources: Financial Tracking System/May18)

The ACMAD's bulletin recommends a close monitoring of the situation, especially in zone I.

Figure 1 : Seasonal precipitation forecast for July-August-September 2012 issued on 23rd May 2012



Source : ACMAD

The locust situation is disturbing (figure 2). According to FAO, more immature adult groups and swarms are expected to move to central Algeria (In Salah and Adrar), southern Tunisia and western Libya (Ghadames, Sabha).

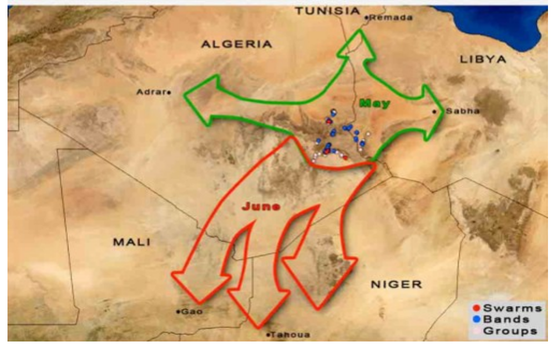
***Objective**: within the framework of the monthly meetings of the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group for West Africa, it has been agreed that, in a humanitarian perspective, WFP and FAO provide the group with highlights on the food security situation of the previous month. This document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

Growing season and locust situation (continued)

In June, a few small swarms are likely to arrive in northern Mali (from Tessalit to Gao and Menaka) and Niger (Tasmena, Air mountain, Tahoua, Tanout). Countries must be on high alert, especially if rains start before this summer. As of mid-May, some places have already received low rain.

There is a high risk that some adults will continue south into the main cropping zones of the Sahel. As of May 30, a group af adults was localised in Arlit (Niger).

Figure 2 : As of May 21 : Threat of swarms in the Sahel



Source : FAO

Crisis in Mali and impact on neighbouring countries (map 1, p 4)

To date, according to the government, 4.6 million people are estimated to be food insecure due to the food and nutritional crisis and the conflict in Mali. The situation in the northern Mali remains precarious, leading people to flee rebel-held areas. However, in other regions, humanitarian activities are ongoing.

As of June 5, according to OCHA the number of internally displaced people (IDP) was estimated at 167 257 and the number of refugees at 67 164 in Mauritania and at 41 667 in Niger. As of June 7, according to UNHCR, the number of refugees was estimated at 64 864 in Burkina Faso. However, continuing population movements complicate accurate assessment. Most IDPs live with host families and rely on them for food access. Data on refugees remains incomplete, particularly for those arriving with livestock or transferring to camps.

As of end of April, an additional 104 villages in Kidal, Mopti, Gao and Tombouctou, have been identified as at risk by Mali EWS. Therefore, these are now considered as 'food crisis' areas. At the same time, the Food Security Commission confirmed that although the implementation of the emergency response plan was slowly continuing, it remained underfunded. According to UNICEF, the nutrition situation in northern Mali is of concern and is being addressed by few humanitarian partners.

Efforts to assist IDPs continue. A recent study conducted by FONGIM (forum des ONG Internationales au Mali) estimated the number of IDPs at 10 000 in Mopti. The report states that if nothing is done to assist these IDPs by the onset of the rainy season, their living conditions will deteriorate.
A humanitarian convoy led by the High Islamic Council left for the north with around 180 metric tons of food and non-food items. This aid is distributed in a difficult context for humanitarian organizations while another convoy (with food and medicine) has been stopped by Ansar Dine who refuse to allow women to participate in food distribution committees.

According to ACF-**Mali**, the situation in Gao and particularly in *cercle d'Ansongo* remains a concern. There is a shortage of staple foods on the market and a price hike due to the disruption of traditional channels (from south to north) and looting of food in Gao, which was then delivered to Kidal. Despite few opportunities (general good health of livestock, stability of labour costs, good start of market gardening), the inability to implement the national response plan (to date, food distributions only took place in the *cercle de Niakunfe* in Northern Mali), high fuel and food prices, and declining terms of trade and stocks on markets, call for urgent humanitarian assistance. Declining terms of trade for goat/millet affected the purchasing power of agro-pastoralist households. This situation is due to grain price hikes and the collapse of livestock prices. It is estimated that terms of trade decreased by 46% for sheep/millet and by 44% for goat/millet.

In **Mauritania**, UNHCR is currently conducting an internal verification exercise of its database to track the exact number of refugees within the M'bera camp, following which a second round of formal registrations of the refugees will be conducted. According to HCR, the refugee caseload could reach 70 000 in the coming months, putting pressure on available resources to cover all the needs. Food distributions to 56 000 refugees, covering needs for a period of 15 days, have started. Other distributions are scheduled but the gap between needs and assistance leads refugees to leave the camp and seek refuge in neighboring villages.

A joint UN assessment conducted in Bassiknou shows that poor structural conditions (understaffed health center, lack of drinking water access, critical nutritional situation) further deteriorated with the influx of refugees. The assessment found that the closer the village is to the camp, the worse the nutritional situation is for pregnant and lactating women as well as for children under 5. The overloaded capacity of pastoral areas is exacerbated by the arrival of refugees' livestock. Furthermore, incomes of poor households living in the camp neighborhood are affected by competition with refugees. Moreover, insecurity in Mali hinders seasonal migrations and further reduces income options for the Mauritanian population .

Crisis in Mali and impact on neighbouring countries (continued)

In **Burkina Faso**, the influx of refugees continues in an increasingly difficult context. According to the Red Cross, stocks are close to zero in all northern areas, adding pressure on markets that have a low supply of staple grains. Regarding the pastoral situation, the arrival of Malian livestock increases the lack of access to water points and fodder (fodder stocks have depleted since February, according to FEWS NET), leading to a deterioration in the physical health of the herds. Therefore, a decrease in livestock price and a reduction of sources of income for local population is observed. The seasonal decline in terms of trade decline has started earlier than usual.

In **Niger**, according to ACTED, maize distribution to population in Abala camp who are not used to this cereal and who don't have a mortar and pestle, is problematic.
Refugees have to walk to Abala mills situated 2km from the camp to mill the maize. Moreover, with the onset of rains, the storage of maize becomes more difficult. 2 000 livestock were observed on site.

Regarding cohabitation with local populations, access to firewood remains the main issue and longer collection times of wood are observed. As a result, the resources are over exploited and this situation could lead to potential conflicts.

According to FEWS NET, the arrival of 26 000 refugees in Niger increased the demand for grain by 460 tons/month. Although part of their food needs are met by humanitarian organizations, food assistance is still needed for these populations, which are continuously increasing. The government response plan did not plan to assist these populations. At the moment, the impact of refugees on markets is not of concern.

Guinea-Bissau : the situation remains difficult

In the aftermath of the coup, the political and socio-economic situation remains precarious : state institutions, public services and schools remain paralysed, in spite of the return of families who were forced to flee Bissau and seek refuge elsewhere in the country.

The cashew nut trade –the main source of income for households– has resumed. Cashew nuts are sold at 300-350 Francs CFA per Kg and farm gate prices are increasing as a result of limited supply. Despite these high prices, a 30% drop in harvest could be observed compared to 2011, due to bad weather conditions. The informal cross-border trade is very active and visible, and it is estimated that 10 000 tons of cashew nuts have been transported to Senegal since the coup. The export of cashew nuts seems to be constrained due to lack of transport options.

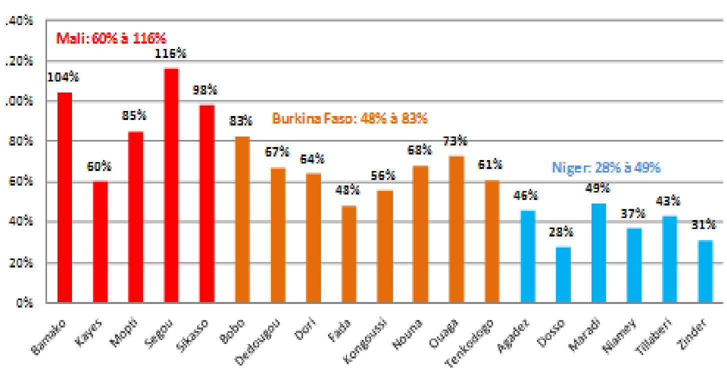
According to the temporary food security cluster, there is no food crisis in the country, although the cashew nut harvest remains unpredictable and needs to be futher assessed. This observation is confirmed by a WFP study which shows that, despite declining food stocks and price increases, food security is not yet a concern. However, the longer this status quo lasts, the greater the risk of a food crisis for vulnerable communities will be.

Coarse grain prices in the Sahel : downward trend or stability in Burkina Faso and increases in Mali and Niger

Some areas in the Sahel are facing a supply shortage in coarse grains mainly due to insecurity in northern Mali, limited access and high demand on markets. To a lesser extent, the influx of refugees adds pressure on markets in Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso.

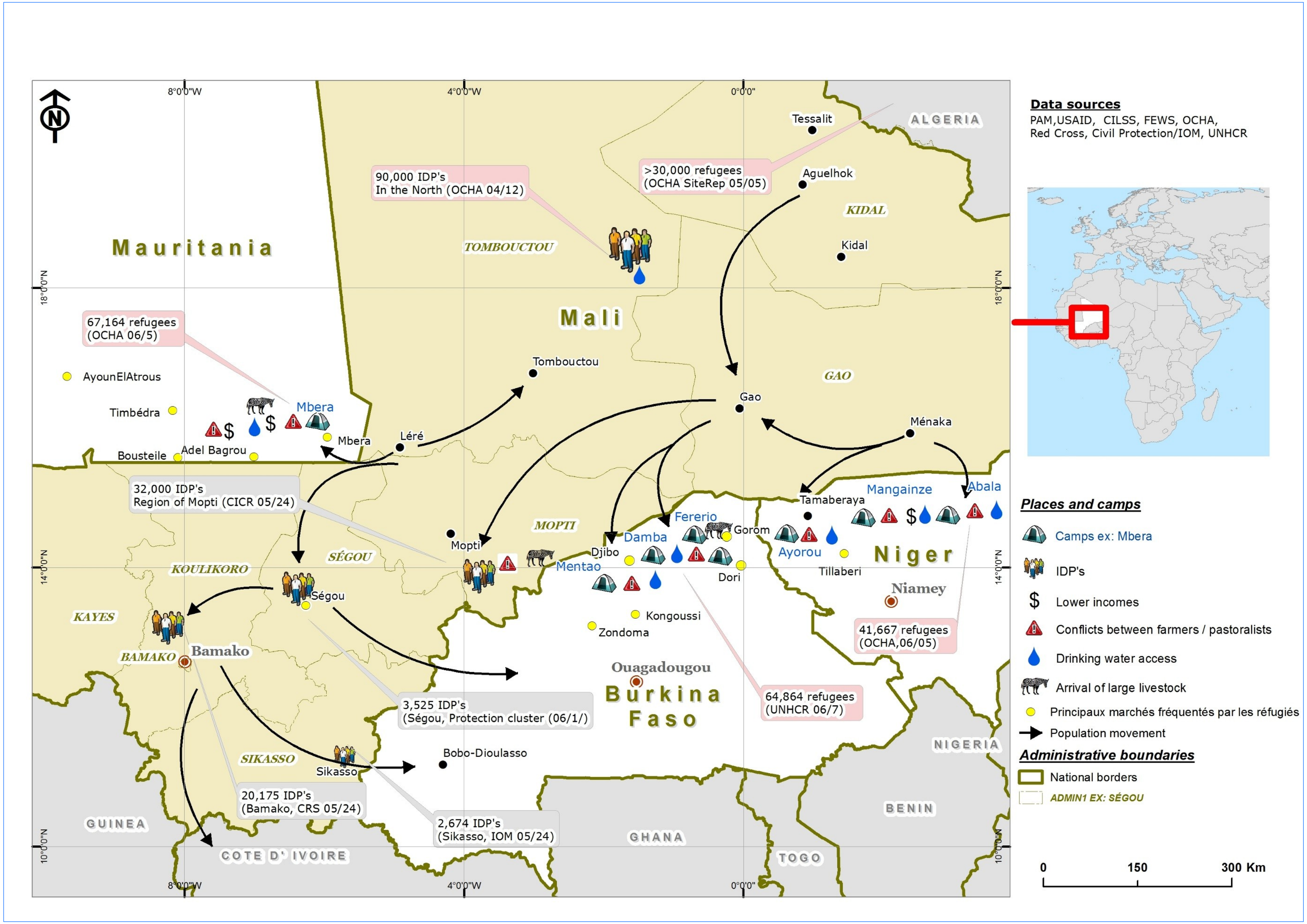
In May, coarse grain prices remained high compared to last month in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. This increase is due to high demand and low level of supply in some places.

Figure 3 : Millet price in April 2012 compared to the 5-year average in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger



Sources: FAO/GIEWS

Map 1 : Food security and population movement



Grain prices in the Sahel : downward trend or stability in Burkina Faso and increases in Mali and Niger (continued)

In Niger, compared to April 2012, millet and sorghum prices increased while maize price remains stable. In Agadez, Zinder, Tillaberi and Niamey, millet increased by 15%, 11%, 7% and 6%, respectively. Sorghum increased by 16% and 10% in Tillaberi and Zinder respectively. According to *Afrique Verte*, the market in Agadez remains the most expensive, followed by Tillaberi and Zinder. Compared to the 5-year average, millet prices increased by 28% to 49% and the most significant rise was observed in Maradi (figure 3).

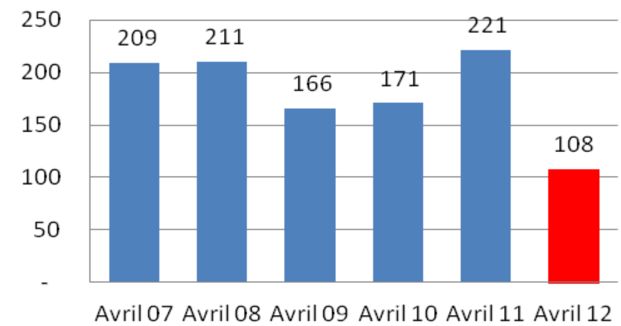
In Burkina Faso, compared to April 2012, a downward trend or stability is observed in some places. However, in Bam, millet, sorghum and maize increased by 14%, 15% and 18%, respectively (*Afrique Verte*). Compared to the 5-year average, millet prices increased by 48% to 83% and the most significant rise was observed in Bobo.

In Mali, compared to April 2012, millet and sorghum increased by 12% while maize increased by 15% in Segou (*Afrique Verte*). Compared to the 5-year average, millet increased by 60% to 116%, and the most significant rise is observed in Segou (figure 3). Supply from neighbouring countries is affected.

According to the preliminary results of the joint (WFP, FAO, ACF, CILSS, FEWS NET) market assessment in the Central Basin, a significant rise is observed for millet and sorghum. The rise is less important for maize whose availability is under pressure (northern Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and southwestern Burkina). The price of imported rice remains stable. Overall, a high demand in deficit areas and a low offer due to limited sales from traders and wholesalers has been observed. On markets, wholesalers are reluctant to keep their stocks, considering high grain prices, tight margins and the prospect of price decreases with the expected start of destocking.

If livestock prices remain stable, the purchasing power of herders deteriorates due to the significant increase in grain prices. In April, terms of trade in Djibo deteriorated significantly (-51% for goat/millet) compared to 2011. These terms of trade remain unfavourable compared to the 5-year average (-45%). This deterioration is due to the continuous rise of millet prices in Djibo (+7% compared to the 5-year average).

Figure 5 : Terms of trade goat/millet in Djibo (Burkina Faso)



Sources : SIMSONAGESS/DGPSE/MRA

In Niger, terms of trade for goat/millet and onion/millet further deteriorated for households selling a goat in Abalak or producers selling a bag of onions in Agadez. A household could obtain 71kg of millet in April 2012 as compared to 89 kg in April 2011 (Albichir).
In Agadez, a producer could obtain 79 kg of millet by selling a 100kg bag of onions in April 2012 as compared to 147 kg of millet during the same period, a year ago.

The low Euro exchange rate on international markets and against US Dollar could impact import costs for countries of the Franc CFA zone. The figure below shows the evolution of the exchange rate euro/naira. This change also impacts cross border trade between Niger and Nigeria : the Naira exchange rate was 330/1000 francs CFA in April 2012 and was 315/1000 francs CFA at the end of May 2012. As a result of the depreciation of the Euro, the Franc CFA depreciates against the Naira and leads to higher import prices from Nigeria to countries of the Franc CFA zone (Niger and especially Chad).

In Maradi, traders interviewed by WFP, keep on buying but are driving prices higher. This trend should be closely monitored.

Figure 6 : Evolution of exchange rate euro/naira

Cashew nut season in West Africa

While the cashew nut campaign comes to an end in most west African countries (Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire) the situation in Guinea Bissau remains a matter of concern for importers of African nuts as the export through the port of Bissau remains impossible. This situation is putting pressure on other countries in the sub-region and especially on Senegal, where farm gate prices reach 400 FCFA/kg. (source: RONGEAD)

Impact on food security

The recent SAP bulletin in Niger confirms that despite aid from the government and partners since November 2011, food and nutrition security deteriorated in 48% of the areas identified as vulnerable in May 2012. The deterioration in food consumption could further worsen already critical acute malnutrition rates. Regional conflicts further exacerbate the situation due to the reduction of cross-border trade, loss of opportunities and remittances, influx of refugees and returnees in vulnerable communities in Niger, disruption of seasonal movements for pastoralists, lack of access to grazing pastures and water points, and deterioration in the terms of trade for herders.

In Burkina Faso, the joint food security assessment conducted by WFP and the government shows that 23% of households living in areas at risk are severely food insecure and 31% are moderately food insecure. This confirms the precarious situation of households living in drought affected areas. These rates are particularly high in Sourou, Bam (north-center), Gnagna and Komandjoari (east), Ganzourgou and Kourweogo (central plateau) and Soum and Oudalan (Sahel) where two-thirds of households are food insecure. The main sources of income for households that are severely food insecure are subsistence agriculture, livestock farming, handicrafts and gifts.

In Senegal, according to the national household survey on the perceptions of the situation, 82% of households have seen their food expenditures increase in the first quarter of 2012. Moreover, the percentage of households consuming three meals per day fell since the last quarter of 2011. This may be attributed to inflation and income decline, which affected 35% of households during the first quarter of 2012.

New surveys on food security are ongoing in Chad and Mali. In addition, partners of the CILSS 'Cadre Harmonise' (FAO, WFP, FEWS NET, Oxfam, ACF, Save The Children) updated the analysis of the regional food security situation in Niamey (during the first week of June). Updated maps were also presented at the last PREGEC meeting in Niamey.

Sahel 2012: Has WFP procurement disrupted regional grain markets?

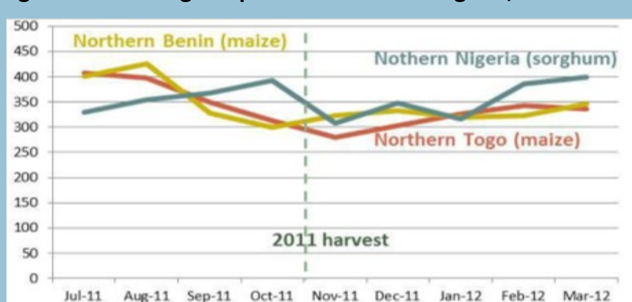
A study has been conducted in order to assess the short-term market impacts of local and regional grain purchases carried out earlier this year by the World Food Programme in West Africa :

> As of April 2012, there is little evidence of adverse market impacts of WFP's local and regional grain purchases. During the months of May and June, grain prices in the Sahel are expected to remain high and volatile, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso, primarily due to pre-existing strains in the market and production deficits.

> Observed grain price increases may be due to normal seasonal trends, and high private demand following production shortfalls in the Sahel. In Nigeria, price increases are most likely due to the high demand across the Sahel, the conflict with Boko Haram and increase of fuel prices by 50% in January 2012.
Moreover, speculation around government buying may have taken place, but this phenomenon should be further analyzed.

> Opportunities for local and regional procurement will remain limited until grain supply improves with the main harvest in October 2012. In the Central Basin, regional purchases will remain limited and priority will be given to international purchases.

Figure 4 : Coarse grain prices in northern Nigeria, northern Benin and northern Togo



Source: FAO/GIEWS data

Recommendations for the regional food security and nutrition working group

Measures	Advantages
Share and consolidate information on food security in northern Mali	Decision makers can develop a relevant advocacy and intervention strategy for the most vulnerable households
Implement a market analysis in the Central Basin	Partners involved take adequate decisions to improve food availability and accessibility in the Central Basin
Support Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania in the elaboration of their humanitarian appeals	Partners involved are informed of the humanitarian needs in the three countries
Urgently support livestock activities and fund 2012-2013 off-season activities	The low response to the agricultural sector is offset by livestock activities as well as activities during the 2012-2013 off-season

Conclusions

- **Political instability and insecurity in some countries is affecting households food security. The refugee and IDP situation in Mali remains a matter of concern; close monitoring of the situation by local stakeholders and neighbouring countries is needed. In the aftermath of the Coup in Guinea Bissau, food security is not a concern. However the status quo is affecting the trade of cashew nuts and could have adverse consequences if nothing changes.**

- **Grain prices remain high in most of the countries, making it difficult for households to replenish their stocks before the lean season. Price increases observed in Burkina Faso and Niger remain a matter of concern, while prices on Malian markets are alarming. High food prices result in declining terms of trade, and increase the vulnerability of pastoralists already facing poor food access.**

- **The low response to humanitarian appeals at the onset of the growing season could jeopardise this year's harvest for the most vulnerable households if urgent action is not taken to strengthen their livelihoods.**

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

www.wfp.org/food-security

Ms. Naouar Labidi
Naouar.Labidi@wfp.org

M. Idrissa Noma
Idrissa.Noma@wfp.org

M. Cédric Charpentier
Cedric.Charpentier@wfp.org

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

M. José Luis Fernandez
Joseluis.Fernandez@fao.org

M. Patrick David
Patrick.David@fao.org

M. Pape Boubacar Soumaré
PapaBoubacar.Soumare@fao.org