

SPECIAL REPORT
FAO CROP AND FOOD SUPPLY ASSESSMENT MISSION
TO CAPE VERDE

10 January 2005

Highlights

- Locust invasions and, more particularly, drought caused maize production to fall to one-third (4 042 tonnes) of last year's level. All the islands with farming activities have been affected by these problems.
- Locust damage to pastures has been very severe in the arid and semi-arid zones, creating a serious problem for livestock.
- Nevertheless, as the swarms arrive in the lower and drier parts of the islands, it is often possible to contain them with treatments before the locusts fly up towards the wet and higher zones where they would cause great damage and would also find ideal conditions for reproduction (wet ground). This means of progression by «stasis», linked to the strong declivity of the islands marks a difference from the mainland where the infestations propagate across flat stretches of land and meet no obstacles. However, this year the arrival of successive waves of locusts was noted in Cape Verde, which complicates prevention work.
- The capacity of domestic production to meet the country's food requirements has always been very poor. It has been reduced yet further by this year's difficulties at a time when a large part of the population is suffering from food vulnerability. As a result, the food situation risks being very difficult in the short term for the most vulnerable rural populations.
- To ensure an adequate level of food supplies, it will be necessary to import around 100 000 tonnes of cereals. With commercial imports expected to amount to 41 500 tonnes and promised food aid to 27 000 tonnes, there will be a deficit of about 30 000 tonnes and so additional food aid will be needed.
- The food situation risks being very difficult in the short term for the most vulnerable populations. Between now and January/February, the situation may become untenable if these people do not receive any aid.
- The problem of food vulnerability is not only restricted to the countryside, it exists in the towns where about half the population is concentrated. Public works («cash for work», financed by food-aid counterpart funds) are a good way to access food aid but benefit only those living in the countryside.
- The Mission recommends urgent action in order to restore farmers' productive capacity, mainly by providing seeds which are suitable for the agricultural and climate conditions of the country.

1. OVERVIEW

A joint CILSS/FAO crop and food supply assessment mission visited Cape Verde from 25 October to 3 November 2004. The mission worked in collaboration with the various national services involved in monitoring crop development on the occasion of a working session with the GTP to confirm the data on the crop season. The mission also met the various bodies (national offices, cooperation agencies, and NGOs) monitoring food security and implementing the food aid programme, namely:



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME

- the DGASP (General Department for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forestry and Rural Engineering) which coordinates services for agriculture, plant protection and animal husbandry;
- the DSSA (Department for Food Security Services);
- the GEP (Studies and Planning Office);
- the DGCI (the General Directorate for International Cooperation);
- The Pensions Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Integration;
- ANSA (the National Food Security Agency);
- An importer, member of the panel managed by ANSA;
- The FAO Representative Office;
- The European Union;
- WFP (the World Food Programme);
- MORABI (the Association in Support of Women's Self-Promotion in Development);
- ACDI/VOCA (an American Development NGO);
- CARITAS.

The mission, accompanied by Multi-disciplinary Working Group members, went into the field on the islands of Santiago and Fogo (which supply the most important part of agricultural production) in order to assess the state of the crops and the desert locust situation, and to hear the opinions of some of the producers and technicians of the delegations working in the field as regards the development and output of the season and concerning the emergency and long-term support measures that need to be arranged.

The mission was able to witness the large-scale damage caused to food production in the archipelago as a result of the combined effect of drought and locusts. The production of rainfed maize was down by two-thirds in relation to the previous year. Now, even if Cape Verde's own production has always only accounted for a small part of domestic consumption, the sharp drop recorded this year will have rapid and serious consequences for food security because this maize is for home consumption, and a large proportion of farmers are finding themselves in a situation of great poverty and food vulnerability. Haricot beans, which are usually associated with maize, have also been badly affected by the drought, including the sub-wet zones where arrests in growth mean that in very many cases the plants (maize or beans) will have to be given to animals as fodder starting in December or January.

Locusts and drought have caused serious damage to pastures in the arid and semi-arid zones. The effects are beginning to be seen in the state of the animals and special efforts will have to be made to provide fodder for livestock farmers, in particular by supplying hay from the higher areas of the islands which are less dry.

This year's difficulties have worsened the country's food vulnerability problems in both the rural and the urban contexts. Covering needs is fairly dense and done in a well-trying way, as they were the first to do so, by «monetizing» aid by creating paid work decided by the authorities in order to carry out public works. However, this scheme does not exist in the towns, where WFP, the Red Cross, and other NGOs are distributing crucial food aid, but their support may not be enough to cover all the requirements.

The study being carried out at the moment by the Food Security Department together with WFP will better identify the needs and enable the targeting of food aid according to degree of poverty. A halt in WFP's activities after 2006 will pose the problem of knowing how to address the difficulties caused by poverty. The passage of Cape Verde into the group of «medium development» countries at the human level does not necessarily mean that there has been sufficient improvement in reducing «pockets» of poverty and food vulnerability, especially in the urban context.

This crisis, due to locusts and drought, at the same time presents the agriculture sector with the problem of urgency and the problem of defining its methods of work. These two questions are closely linked since the urgency could be a further encouragement to move on to solutions with better prospects. A plan is needed in the very short term in order to preserve the nutritional balance of the farming population, to save the livestock and to reconstitute production capacity for the next season, in particular as regards seeds. In a less immediate term, the only viable solution is to reconvert to micro-irrigation given the country's low level of water reserves. The creation of more rational family livestock units should also be encouraged.

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