

SPECIAL REPORT

INTER-AGENCY CROP AND FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO NIGER

4 February 2013

Highlights

- Despite flooding in parts, adequate rainfall during the main cropping season together with improved distribution of key inputs, has resulted in a favourable cereal harvest in 2012.
- Aggregate cereal production, estimated at over 5.1 million tonnes (including off-season crop harvest forecasts) is about 42 percent higher than the 2011 output and well above the average of the past five years.
- Accordingly, the country is expected to have a cereal surplus that would partly help the replenishment of stocks, which were depleted after the 2011/12 food crisis.
- With the exception of a few localized areas, the rangelands have also recovered well and the water points have been replenished.
- The improved harvest position, coupled with favourable crop prospects in most neighbouring countries, is expected to lead to a much improved food availability during the 2012/13 marketing year (November-October).
- This generally favourable situation nevertheless follows in the wake of a particularly difficult year. In 2011, late rains and prolonged dry spells seriously compromised agricultural and pasture production across the country. Cereals production dropped by 31 percent compared to the previous year, while biomass production in the pastoral zones was 50 percent below domestic requirements.
- The Mission found that the 2011/12 food crisis had caused a drop in incomes, substantial loss of assets, increased levels of household indebtedness, and deteriorated the nutritional situation of the pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and other farming groups.
- The Inter-agency Assessment Mission considers it a matter of urgency to improve household purchasing power and access to food that is available domestically by supporting off-season cropping and other income-generating activities. Support also needs to be given to the marketing of agricultural products through local purchases, where possible, and the replenishment of national food security stocks. It is also essential to continue supporting the nutritional recuperation centres.

OVERVIEW

Niger has been struck by a series of food crises in recent years (in 2004/05, 2008/10 and 2011/12). The 2011/12 food crisis, like the previous ones, not only led to a dramatic slump in agricultural and pastoral production, but also a loss of assets, livestock and other forms of saving and a high level of household indebtedness. This has had a serious impact on the population's nutritional and health status, especially among children aged under five. The general malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition rates have reached very high levels in both the rural and the urban populations. In July 2012, 14.8 percent of the children in the country were suffering from global acute malnutrition (GAM). Malnutrition rate is higher than the WHO's 15 percent emergency threshold in 4 regions of the country (out of 7).

It was against this background that the Government of Niger, FAO, WFP, CILSS and FEWS Net conducted a thorough assessment of crop, pasture and food security situation to have a good understanding of the food situation and outlook, in order to allow the Government to design, prepare and implement sound income- and production-generating activities that will enable the people to access the food produced in 2012. The fallout from the 2011/12 crisis, and notably household debt levels are such that even with a satisfactory 2012 season there is no doubt that many households in Niger will continue to face food insecurity during the 2012/13 commercial year.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME

The joint FAO/WFP/CILSS/FEWSNet Mission visited the country from 22 October to 9 November 2012. During the first week, the Mission team members, working in conjunction with officials from the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock, adopted the mission's work programme and held working meetings with the national agencies involved in crop and food security monitoring. A meeting was held with the Multidisciplinary Working Group attended by representatives of the Crop Protection Directorate (DPV), the Food Crop Directorate (DCV), the National Meteorological Agency, the Early Warning System (EWS), the National Food Crisis Management and Prevention Agency (DNPGCA), the livestock market information Systems (SIM Bétail) and the agricultural markets information Systems (SIM), and the Agricultural Statistics Directorate. The mission enjoyed the support of all the central and regional Directorates of the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock and of the other services and ministries whose assistance had been requested.

The Mission was divided into two groups, and was able to visit five departments in Tillabéri (Tillabéri, Filingue and Abala) and Dosso (Loga et Doutchi) regions. Field visits were limited to 2 regions mostly for security reasons, but Tillabéri and Dosso are also the regions where crop and pasture production were affected by irregular rains in 2012. The assessment methodology included data collection at the level of region, department, village and household. The team carried out field visits to observe the state of the crops and the rangelands and to interview farmers and herdsman on crop conditions, expected yields and their adaptation strategies. Team members also visited markets in order to discuss market conditions and input and output price movements. The mission also visited recuperation and nutrition centres, and interviewed their officials. The Mission held meetings with various technical services and key informants, and conducted numerous focus group-type interviews to gauge the impact of the 2011/12 food crisis on households income level and debt, 2012 planted areas, food prospects, and so on.

The preliminary findings of the Mission have been presented to the Ministry of Agriculture and his senior staff. A debriefing meeting was also organized with UN agencies including FAO, WFP and UNDP.

A good cereal harvest was gathered in 2012. Despite flooding in parts, adequate rainfall during the main cropping season together with improved distribution of key inputs, has resulted in a favourable cereal harvest in 2012. With the exception of a few localized areas, the rangelands have recovered well and the water points have been replenished. However, many bush fires have been reported. Over 100 000 hectares of range lands have been destroyed as of mid-November 2012.

Overall, the Mission estimated 2012 aggregate cereals production at about 5.1 million tonnes (including off-season crop harvest forecasts), which is about 42 percent higher than the 2011 drought-affected output. According to these figures, the country should have a significant cereal surplus. This surplus will be used partly to replenish stocks, which were depleted after the 2011/12 food crisis. Forecast commercial imports of wheat and rice, for which the country has a structural deficit, will cover the estimated needs.

However, the 2011/12 food crisis – like the 2005 and 2010 ones - has had very adverse, longer-term impact on household assets and savings, on levels of indebtedness, and on the health and nutritional status of the population. Despite the good crop gathered in 2012, several segments of the population will still need food and nonfood assistance to restore their resilience capacity and to enable them to have better access to food. This assistance must be provided as soon as possible in order to prevent the negative impacts that could further weaken their means of subsistence after their own food stocks are exhausted.

This report has been prepared by Jean Senahoun, Cheikh Ibrahima Ndiaye, Hervé Ouédraogo under the responsibility of the FAO Secretariat with information from official and other sources based on a Joint CILSS/FAO/FEWSNET/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission with the participation of the following Maty Ba Diao (CILSS), Mamadou Samakè (CILSS), Jean Senahoun (FAO), Cheikh Ibrahima Ndiaye (FAO), Hervé Ouédraogo (FAO), Amadou Diop (FAO), Abdou Moussa (FAO), Senoussi Fode Camara (FAO), Mahamane Nasser Almadjir (FEWSNet), Lawan Tahirou (WFP), Maman Adamou (WFP). Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact the undersigned for further information if required.

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