Safeguarding livelihoods and food security from anticipated flood impacts

In 2022, West Africa and the Sahel region experienced one of the worst years in recent history in terms of humanitarian impacts from floods, with Chad, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria among the countries most affected. The growing frequency, intensity and gravity of climate and weather-related disasters, including floods, are jeopardizing the region’s entire food system and particularly the agriculture sector.

Floods are especially threatening as they can undermine crop yields and livestock health, resulting in lower food production and availability, depleted food reserves and interruptions in food supply. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) carried out an analysis on the impact of flooding on agriculture in six countries (Chad, Guinea, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal) which showed that around 1.4 million people lost their livelihoods as a result. Flooding also affected more than 2.7 million ha of agricultural land and 1.2 million heads of livestock.

In early May 2023, the Seasonal Forecasting of the Agro-Hydro-Climatic Characteristics of the Rainy Season for the Sahelian and Sudanian Zones of West Africa and the Sahel Forum issued a regional bulletin highlighting that most of the forthcoming rainy season in the region is going to be wetter than average, with overall above-average to average flows in the main river basins of the Sahel. Combined with other shocks and risks affecting the region, in particular the continuous increase in food prices and insecurity, this new risk of flooding for 2023 may further impact people and their livelihoods who already suffered from flood impacts in 2022, as well as exacerbate an already alarming food insecurity context.
Following these early warning signs, and thanks to the German Federal Foreign Office’s contribution to the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities – Anticipatory Action window, FAO is launching a no-regrets subregional Anticipatory Action initiative focusing on strengthening early warning messages and risk awareness for communities, and implementing actions to safeguard crops and livestock. The intervention will benefit 30,865 vulnerable households (210,200 people) in flood-prone areas and with high levels of food insecurity, integrating conflict- and gender-sensitive measures into project planning and implementation to ensure the inclusive participation of women and youths from diverse backgrounds.

FAO will also closely capture lessons learned and data, while strengthening regional capacities for the rapid evaluation of flood impacts during the 2023 rainy season. This will ensure that stronger preparedness may contribute to a swifter and more effective identification of humanitarian needs due to flooding in areas that were not covered by anticipatory actions given funding limitations, thereby ensuring the link between Anticipatory Action and rapid response to the needs of affected communities.

Anticipatory actions, through scaling up early warning messaging and risk awareness, and safeguarding crops and livestock, can mitigate the impact of flooding on vulnerable communities’ livelihoods and food security.