

# SAHELIAN AND WEST AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS AVOID SURPRISES THANKS TO SEASONAL MONITORING



**WORKING FOR** people in drought-prone countries of the Sahel and West Africa

**WORKING TO** build drought-resilience through fact-based forecasting

**WORKING WITH** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Famine and Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) and WFP

**WORKING THANKS TO** more than 25 multilateral and bilateral donors, CILSS member governments



In 2011, several international organizations forecast severe food shortages that would affect food security in the Sahel. However, when the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) analysed the data it had collected in its satellite data centre, plus the agricultural data provided by the countries, it suggested a different scenario. CILSS determined that the amount of food produced would actually be sufficient. Rather, the problem would be one of “access”, meaning people would not have enough money to buy the food that was available. The CILSS forecast proved to be correct.

This is the kind of outcome that has become expected from this organization, whose motto is *jamaïs surpris* or “never surprised”. CILSS, founded by FAO in response to an elongated Sahelian drought that began in the late 1960s, initially covered the nine Sahelian countries. Now, its mandate extends to the West African coastal countries, as the technical arm of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). CILSS works consistently

**The calendar of the Permanent** Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) is booked well in advance. CILSS, the technical arm of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), monitors the food security of 17 West African and Sahelian countries, runs a large satellite data centre, and has established a proven protocol that countries follow in collecting their food-security data. At the beginning, middle and end of each cropping season, CILSS member countries and partners meet at regional workshops and use the data to analyse the agriculture and food-security situation. The resulting “cereal balance-sheets” produced for each member country are respected for their accuracy in predicting and explaining the results of each cropping season. FAO supported the founding of CILSS in 1973, in the midst of a prolonged and devastating drought, and has continued its capacity-development support ever since. CILSS’ goal has always been to mobilize Sahelian countries and the international community to work towards drought resilience in the region, while maintaining national autonomy and reducing reliance on external aid.

to ensure that its members are never surprised by changing weather or market conditions that can affect their national food security.

FAO and CILSS have worked together for four decades, with FAO providing technical expertise and financial support. The CILSS Secretariat in



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Burkina Faso was originally housed at FAO headquarters in Rome. Today, CILSS is a permanent regional committee for drought control, and maintains a rigorous agenda that calls for analysing, forecasting and taking action to mitigate the effects of drought in its 17 West African and Sahelian member countries.

### **SEASONAL REGIONAL WORKSHOPS ENSURE MODERN MONITORING**

CILSS is improving its capacity to monitor food security in the region in real time, with techniques that range from cutting-edge satellite and data-management systems, to monitoring missions with technical partners in each of the 17 countries during the course of every agricultural season. Each year it holds five regional workshops on Prevention and Management of Food Crises (PREGEC), for countries to present crop-assessment outcomes and reach consensus. All the information feeds into “cereal balance-sheets”, which are reports that CILSS prepares for each member country.

These balance sheets compute national production, planned imports and available food aid and food reserves, and compare them to consumption. At its year-end PREGEC workshop, CILSS brings together

OECD and other partners, along with FAO technical experts in agronomy, statistics and early-warning systems. This Food Crises Prevention Network in the Sahel and West Africa (RPCA) looks at all the cereal balance-sheets and other data to determine what, if any, support the countries might need in the coming season, so interventions can be readied for swift implementation in order to keep bad situations from worsening.

FAO has strongly supported CILSS in developing its *Cadre Harmonisé* (harmonized framework), a tool now implemented at country level that complements the balance sheet by classifying the current and projected food-security situation on a standard scale across the region. The standard scale is based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a tool developed by FAO that allows comparison of the severity of food insecurity across space and time.

### **CILSS TRAINING COMPONENT CONTRIBUTES TO REGIONAL DROUGHT RESILIENCE**

Throughout the Sahel, food security is linked to drought resilience. CILSS has expanded from its initial focus on soil and water conservation to sophisticated information and data-reporting

systems. CILSS constantly monitors the region, seeking ways to build resilience into the fragile ecosystem that provides livelihoods for millions of pastoralists and farmers.

CILSS operates a regional training centre in Niger, where agriculturists and technicians can continue their education. Known as AGRHYMET – for the agriculture, hydrology and meteorology courses taught there – its curriculum includes courses in natural resource management, climate change adaptation and plant protection, giving equal import to studies in information management and information systems. FAO has supported CILSS in harmonizing regulations for control of pesticides through its Sahelian Pesticide Committee, which serves as a clearinghouse for all pesticides coming into the Sahel.

Today, CILSS stands as a strong, independent regional institution, recognized for its ability to ensure there are no surprises (*jamais surpris!*) that will affect the food security of its members.