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**World Food Programme**

# **SPECIAL REPORT**

## **Summary**

### **FAO/WFP CROP AND FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

**14 September 2017**



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**14 September 2017**

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2016, the Ministry of Rural Development (MDR) revised the time series of planted area and crop production estimates.
- Crop production in 2016 is estimated at slightly over 1 million tonnes, about 35 percent up from 2015 and close to the pre-crisis (2008-2012) average.
- This remarkable recovery was mainly driven by an above-average cassava production, while cereal output, despite an increase by 13 percent compared to 2015, remains 27 percent below the pre-crisis average.
- Planted area and yields benefited from generally favourable climatic conditions, localized improvements in the security situation and assistance to farming households by the international community.
- FAO has distributed seeds and tools to 150 700 households.
- Based on the Mission's estimates, a cereal import requirement of approximately 64 000 tonnes for the 2016/17 marketing year (November/October) is forecast. Assuming commercial imports at 23 407 tonnes and food aid in stock and pipeline at 34 000 tonnes, the Mission expects an uncovered cereal deficit of 6 700 tonnes.
- The livestock, fisheries and aquaculture sectors, devastated by the crisis, are gradually recovering, with growth rates ranging from 3 to 6.5 percent in 2015 and 2016.
- Production of cotton, the main cash crop grown in the country, has been heavily affected by the crisis, mainly through the abandonment of fields and the destruction of infrastructures. In 2016/17, cotton production is estimated at just 4 000 tonnes, 75 percent below the pre-crisis levels.
- In December 2016, prices of several food items in Bangui were lower than one year earlier due to improved supply and market conditions but still above their pre-crisis levels in December 2012, as significant constraints still affect crop production and marketing activities. Prices of maize, wheat flour, beef meat, bush meet and fish in December 2016 were 25-35 percent lower than 12 months earlier, but still between 20 and 70 percent above their pre-crisis levels.
- In the areas of the country affected by the resumption of inter-communal violence in September 2016, including parts of Ouham-Pende, Nana-Gribizi, Haute-Kotto and Ouaka prefectures, price trends were different than in Bangui, with sharp price increases observed in the last quarter of 2016.
- One in two households reduced the number of daily meals, 22 percent of the households reduced the quantities of food consumed.
- Sixty percent of the households are estimated to have an inadequate food consumption, with about 27 percent of the households having a poor food consumption and 33 percent having a borderline food consumption.
- The percentage of households with poor food consumption increased from 16 percent in 2015 to 27 percent in 2016.
- Conflict, renewed violence and population movements continue to negatively impact the livelihoods of the country's communities.
- The Government, in cooperation with humanitarian and development partners, should support the development of dialogue platforms between farmers and livestock rearers, aimed at the establishment of local plans for land management and conflict resolution.
- Given the pivotal role of agriculture in the National Plan for the Restoration and the Consolidation of Peace (RCPCA) as a factor in national reconciliation, in alleviating socio-economic inequalities among regions, creating job opportunities and strengthening food security, it is recommended to stimulate food and agricultural production through increased productivity and the reduction of the constraints affecting agricultural activities, notably for women and the youth.
- The establishment of a food security early warning and information system is highly recommended to generate timely data and to inform the decisions of humanitarian and development operators. The strengthening of the capacities of the Central African Institute of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (ICASEES) and the improvement of agricultural statistics would be appropriate for this purpose.

## OVERVIEW

Following a request from the Government of the Central African Republic, a joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) visited the country from 16 to 28 January 2017 to estimate crop production and assess the overall food security situation. In addition to the international members, the Mission benefited from the participation of staff representatives from the Ministry of Rural Development, the Central African Institute of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies and of 16 international and national NGOs tasked with the field survey.

In Bangui, the Mission met with officials from several ministries, national and international organizations, including the two above-mentioned ministries and institutes, the Ministry of Economy, Planning and International Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance and Budget, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the UNDP and the European Commission, to discuss the current situation of the overall economy, of the agriculture sector, of food security and their prospects. The Mission gathered the latest information available on the macro-economic situation, agriculture, trade, economic policy, food prices and humanitarian assistance.

A field survey was conducted to collect data on food production (including agriculture, livestock, water and forests), and food security as well as food prices in the in the main agro-ecological zones of the country.

Based on the information collected, crop production in 2016 is estimated by the Mission at slightly over 1 million tonnes, about 35 percent up from the sharply reduced 2015 harvest and close to the pre-crisis (2008-2012) average. This result is mainly due to a 45 percent increase in cassava production, which was 7 percent above the pre-crisis average. By contrast, cereal output remains 27 percent below the pre-crisis average despite an increase by 13 percent compared to 2015. In particular, the production of millet and sorghum, predominantly grown and consumed in northern prefectures, declined by 6 percent from 2015 and remained 49 percent below average. In these regions, the impact of unfavourable weather conditions was exacerbated by persistent insecurity, which continued to disrupt agricultural activities as well as hindering humanitarian access for the support of rural households.

Based on the Mission's estimates, a cereal import requirement of approximately 64 000 tonnes for the 2016/17 marketing year (November/October) is forecast. Assuming commercial imports at 23 407 tonnes and food aid in stock and pipeline at 34 000 tonnes, the Mission expects an uncovered cereal deficit of 6 700 tonnes. At 24 400 tonnes, the deficit in cassava will be significant in 2016/17, despite the increase in production.

The overall satisfactory outcome of the cropping season followed favourable weather conditions (except in some northern areas), an improvement in security conditions, especially in the western prefectures, and the adoption by farmers of adaptation strategies consisting in an increase of cassava cultivation, as roots are more difficult to be damaged or looted. These favourable factors were compounded by the continued support of the international community and FAO, that distributed seeds and tools to 150 700 households in order to boost food production.

The interviewed communities continue to face daunting structural constraints hindering a substantial increase in local crop production. According to the study on municipalities by the World Bank, only 4 percent of the surveyed municipalities are engaged in trade of agricultural inputs, including fertilizers, seeds and pesticides, with the capital of their sub-prefectures, 10 percent less than in 2012, before the crisis. Veterinary services are reported in only 41 percent of the municipalities, 60 percent less than in 2012, before the crisis.

The livestock sector has been devastated by the conflict, declining by 55 percent in 2013 and by 10 percent in 2014, due to large-scale looting and mass slaughtering of animals, as well as a consequence of the exodus of herders to neighbouring countries, mainly Cameroon and Chad. The sector has subsequently begun to recover with growth rates of 3 percent and 6.5 percent in 2015 and 2016, respectively, following the gradual return of herders to some prefectures, including Nana-Mambéré, Ouham-Pende and Mambéré-Kadeï, where the security situation has improved, and due to vaccination campaigns conducted with FAO's technical assistance.

Despite the improvements in the food supply situation as well as in transport and marketing activities, major constraints continue to hinder agricultural production and trade flows. As a result, in December 2016, prices of most food commodities in Bangui were lower than one year earlier, but still above their pre-crisis levels of December 2012. Prices of maize in December 2016 were 35 percent below the levels of a year earlier, but still 50 percent above their pre-crisis levels of December 2012. Similarly, prices of wheat flour in December were 22 percent lower than 12 months earlier but still 19 percent higher than before the crisis. Prices of bovine meat, bush meat and fish in December 2016 were between 20 and 30 percent lower than 12 months earlier, but still between 40 and 70 percent higher than their pre-crisis levels. By contrast, prices of locally-produced cassava,

the main staple, in December 2016 were 14 percent below their pre-crisis levels due the substantial increase in production.

In the rest of the country, price trends of the main staples were different from the patterns observed in Bangui, as prices sharply increased in late 2016 and early 2017. According to mVAM data, prices of maize increased between November 2016 and January 2017 by 50 and 150 percent in Berberati (Mambéré-Kadéï Prefecture), Bouar (Nana-Mambéré Prefecture), Bozoum (Ouham-Pendé Prefecture), Obo (Haut-Mbomou Prefecture), Yaloké (Ombella-M'Poko Prefecture) and in Zemio (Haut-Mbomou Prefecture) markets. Inter-communal violence was the main driver of the price increases, with the resurgence of fighting in September 2016 in several parts of the country, including Ouham-Pendé, Nana-Grebizi, Haute-Kotto and Ouaka prefectures having caused the displacement of about 70 000 individuals in the last quarter of 2016.

The main income sources for 52 percent of the households are agriculture and sale of agricultural produce. For about 11 percent of the households the main income source is daily agricultural labour, for 2 percent hunting, gathering and fishing, for 2 percent livestock rearing and sale of livestock products. Conflict, renewed violence and population movements continue to negatively impact the livelihoods of the country's communities (ENSA, December 2016). Insecurity and lack of inputs, including seeds still, constrain agricultural production. Among the surveyed communities, 18 percent reported that they were unable to cultivate due to insecurity, 12 percent were unable to access their fields due to displacement and 7 percent had their land confiscated. The communities that were able to cultivate had to face constrains, including looting of harvested crops (8 percent) and difficulties to sell the produce on the market.

The surveyed communities resorted to negative and unsustainable coping strategies: almost one in two households reduced the number of daily meals, 22 percent of the households reduced the quantities of food consumed.

According to the ENSA conducted in October 2016, 60 percent of households are estimated to have an inadequate food consumption. About 27 percent of the households have a poor food consumption and 33 percent have a borderline food consumption. The households with a poor food consumption have an inadequate and insufficiently-diversified diet: they consume mainly cereals (three days per week) and vegetables (two days per week). Proteins, legumes and fruits are consumed less than once a week, while milk and dairy products are essentially not consumed at all. The percentage of households with poor food consumption increased steadily since 2015, from 16 percent in 2015 to 27 percent in 2016.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis conducted by the Mission and the pivotal role of agriculture for the economic and social recovery of the Central African Republic as a factor in national reconciliation, in alleviating socio-economic inequalities among regions, in creating job opportunities and in strengthening food security, warrant the following recommendations:

### Food crops

- As the very low average yields discourage farmers to increase crop production, it is recommended that the Government and its development partners develop and implement voluntarist policies for the widespread introduction of improved crop varieties as well as appropriate agricultural practices, so as to double the yields of the main cereals and to triple those of cassava in a reasonable timeframe, as it has been achieved in other countries of the continent (Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi). For this purpose, the Central African Republic should strengthen its cooperation with institutions, including CIRAD, IITA, FAO and the Rice Centre for Africa.
- Cassava in the Central African Republic should be considered not only as a food staple crop, but also as a raw material for the agro-industry, an input for the production of processed agricultural products and other uses, including starch, alcohol and bio-fuels. This approach will contribute substantially to the creation of job opportunities and to generate income for producers both in the agricultural and in the industrial sectors and for traders.
- Improved yields at smallholder level should be combined with the recovery of animal traction and with the mechanization through the introduction of medium-size machinery (multi-purpose cultivators), with the aim of reducing the hardship of agricultural work and promoting rural entrepreneurship, particularly for women and the youth.

### Cash crops (cotton, cocoa, palm oil)

- The re-launch of cash crop production is essential for the diversification of agricultural incomes and for the recovery and the development of the country's agro-industry. The Government should focus its interventions on the domains of public interest, mainly through the strengthening of the technical and human capacities of institutions, including ICRA (Institut Centrafricain de Recherche Agronomique, Central African Institute for Agronomic Research) and ACDA (Agence Centrafricaine de Développement Agricole, Central African Agency of Agricultural Development), so that they can obtain and multiply high performance plant varieties and distribute them to rural communities, along with the provision of training on appropriate agricultural practices.
- It is necessary to strengthen producer associations, institutionalizing mutual practices of cooperation and empowerment, including village farming schools and village saving and credit associations (improved *tontines*), supported with the introduction of more structured micro-finance or commercial banks.
- The support of smallholder agriculture should follow a supply chain approach from production to commercialization, through the various production stages, in order to avoid bottlenecks and improve the value added by the actors involved.
- It is also recommended to encourage the involvement of national and international private capitals in the development of commercial agriculture and agro-industry through the introduction of incentive measures, including the enforcement of land-owning rights and the restoration of civil security in production areas.

### Livestock

- In the framework of the programme for the recovery of the livestock sector envisaged by the Government as a means of prevention and management of conflicts and for the promotion of peaceful coexistence between farming and pastoralist households, it is recommended to develop grass-fed livestock rearing in urban peripheries, particularly in the close proximity to slaughter houses. This would entail the construction of livestock pens, the widespread introduction of high potential forage crops and the valorization of crop residues and agro-industry by-products.
- Particular emphasis should be placed on the promotion of short-cycle livestock, including small ruminants, swine and poultry in association with other agricultural activities, with the aim to facilitate the inclusion of women and youth in the rural economy.
- The Government, in cooperation with humanitarian and development actors, should promote income-generating activities consistently with the mobility of livestock rearers (promotion of livestock products, including smoked meat, milk for nutrition programmes, cheese production units of small village, etc.).

- The Government, in cooperation with humanitarian and development partners, should support the development of dialogue platforms between farmers and herders, aimed at the establishment of local plans for land allocation to crop-growing and livestock-rearing activities to avoid and manage local conflicts.

#### Fisheries

- In the framework of the National Plan for the Restoration and the Consolidation of Peace (RCPCA), it is recommended to support fishermen, restoring and improving fishing equipment and to strengthen their capacities in every stage of the supply chain, including the co-management of water bodies through responsible fishing. The adoption and application of the Code of Fisheries and Aquaculture, currently under preparation, will be a decisive step in this direction.
- In the case of fish farming, whose development is constrained by insufficient feed and fry, it is recommended to promote the research on substitutes of agro-industry by-products, generally used as fish feed, the association of fish farming with poultry or swine-rearing and the introduction of water forage including azolla and spirulina.
- It is also essential to rehabilitate the Landja fishery station and its branches in Bambari and Bouar to relaunch the production of fry and for the training and the organization of fish farmers in each stage of the supply chain.

#### Multi-sectoral food security and nutrition monitoring system

- In addition to the undertaking of an Agricultural Census covering the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sub-sectors, it is recommended to establish a food security early warning and information system to generate timely data and to inform the decisions of humanitarian and development operators. The strengthening of the capacities of the Central African Institute of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (ICASEES) and the improvement of agricultural statistics would be appropriate for this purpose.

#### Food and nutrition assistance

- It is recommended to continue the ongoing food and nutrition assistance operations, targeting the most vulnerable populations (refugees and displaced persons in sites, camps and enclaves).

