

SPECIAL REPORT

INTER-AGENCY CROP AND FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO NIGER

20 January 2011

Highlights

- Despite the flooding in some parts of the country in July and August 2010, the overall rainfall during the main cropping season was adequate. This, combined with the improved distribution of key inputs, has resulted in a favorable cereal harvest in 2010.
- Aggregate cereals production, estimated at over 5.6 million tonnes (including off-season crop harvest forecasts) is about 60 percent higher than the 2009 output and has exceeded the average of the past five years. The output of *niébé* (cowpea), the main cash crop, is expected to be 1.9 million tonnes compared with 787 472 tonnes in 2009 and 1.5 million tonnes in 2008, setting a new record. According to these figures, the country should have a significant cereal surplus. It is understood that this surplus will be used partly to replenish stocks, which were depleted after the 2009/10 food crisis.
- With the exception of a few localised areas, the rangelands have recovered well following the sound phenological development of the fodder crops, and the water points have been replenished.
- The high level of cereal production, coupled with favourable harvests in the neighbouring countries, particularly in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad, is expected to lead to a much improved and satisfactory food availability during the 2010/11 marketing year.
- This generally favourable situation nevertheless follows in the wake of a particularly difficult year. In 2009, late rains and prolonged episodes of drought seriously compromised agricultural production and caused serious rangeland degradation in the pastoral and agro-pastoral zones of the country. Cereals production slumped by 30 percent below the previous year's output, while biomass production in the pastoral zones was 62 percent below domestic requirements.
- The Mission found that the 2009/10 food crisis had caused a drop in incomes, substantial loss of livestock and other assets, increased levels of household indebtedness, and deteriorated the nutritional situation of the pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and other farming groups.
- Despite the measures adopted by the Government of Niger and its partners, according to the most recent nutrition survey conducted in the country, the acute malnutrition is still extremely worrying, higher than 17 percent in October-November 2010 in the regions of Agadez and Zinder. The many causes of malnutrition have to do with the affected populations' low incomes but they are also related to inadequate care and feeding practices and the lack of access to health care facilities and services.
- The Mission considers it a matter of urgency to improve household purchasing power and access to food that is available domestically by supporting herd replenishment, off-season cropping and other income-generating activities. Support should also be given to agricultural product marketing by replenishing cereals banks and national security stocks and making humanitarian purchases, where possible. It is also essential to continue supporting the nutritional recuperation centres.

OVERVIEW

In 2009/10, Niger suffered a serious food crisis, similar to the one five years earlier, which 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



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people'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 June 2010, 17 percent of the children in the country were suffering from global acute malnutrition (GAM). This figure was 36 percent higher than in the year before.

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 this year to have a good understanding of the situation and of the current prospects, and to design, prepare and implement income- and production-generating activities that will enable the people to access the food produced this year during the course of 2010/11. The fallout from the 2009/10 crisis, and in particular the livestock losses and household debt levels are such that even with a satisfactory 2010 season there is no doubt that many households in Niger will be facing food insecurity within three to at most six months.

The joint Mission visited the country from 18 October to 6 November, 2010. During the first week, the FAO, WFP, CILSS-AGRHYMET and FEWS Net experts and representatives, working in conjunction with officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock adopted the mission's work programme and held working meetings with the national agencies monitoring the agricultural season, and food security. 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 (DNP-GCA), 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 Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and of the other services and ministries whose assistance had been requested.

The Mission was divided into three groups, and was able to visit six of the country's seven regions – Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéry, Zinder and Diffa – between 27 October and 3 November. The only region the mission was unable to visit was Agadez. The assessment methodology included data collection at the level of region, department, village and household. The Mission held meetings with various technical services, regional and subregional food crisis prevention and management committees and conducted numerous focus group-type interviews to gauge the impact of the 2009/10 food crisis on the croplands in 2010 and on the production available for human consumption taking account of the contracted indebtedness, household level food prospects, and so on. One of the goals was also to understand the crisis management and survival strategies implemented.

The team carried out field visits to observe the state of the crops and the rangelands and to interview the farmers and herdsman on production conditions, expected yields and their adaptation strategies. They also visited markets in order to see the movements of prices of the main foodstuffs, particularly cereals, and livestock. Lastly, the mission visited several recuperation and nutrition centres, and interviewed their officials, and organized several focus group-type discussions with small groups of women who had brought their children to the centres, mainly suffering from severe acute malnutrition. The purpose of these visits was to gain a better understanding of the current level of malnutrition, the admissions trend, the prevalence of malnutrition in recent months, and its main causes.

The Mission presented its preliminary findings to WFP, FAO and the "*Comité restreint de concertation Etat – donateurs*" (CRC), made up of officials from the Prime Minister's Office and the leading donors, on 5 November.

The main results of the Mission indicate that the 2010/11 agricultural and pastoral season has produced a record crop as far as cereals are concerned. Despite the floods affecting several regions in July and August, rainfall had been adequate on the whole, enabling the cereals cycle in most of the departments to proceed normally. Food and non-food assistance provided by the government and the partners has also been effective and helped to cushion the impact of the food crisis on seed availability. Apart from a few isolated cases, the range lands recovered well as a result of the good phenological development of the fodder crops, and the water points have been replenished. However, many bush fires have been reported. For example, about 28 000 hectares of range lands were destroyed in the Maradi region during the last two weeks of October.

Based on the provisional production figures, the Mission forecasts a domestic surplus of more than 1 million tonnes in the 2010/11 marketing year. Part of this surplus will be used to replenish stocks, which were depleted after the 2009 slump in production. Another part could also be exported to the cereals-

deficit regions in neighbouring Benin. Forecast commercial imports of wheat and rice, for which the country has a structural deficit, will cover the estimated needs.

However, the 2009-2010 crisis - considered by interviewed farmers and herders to be as serious as the 1973 and 1984 crises - 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. This has been caused by very high livestock mortalities and limited food production, which induced a major negative income effect on already impoverished households, and will constitute a very heavy burden in terms of debt reimbursement in 2010-2011

Despite the 2010/11 agricultural season being generally good at the national level, 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. All these measures should stress the factors that help to improve the marketing of agricultural products and give the people improved access to the available food.

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