



SAHEL WEATHER AND CROP SITUATION REPORT

Report No. 1, 08 June 2006

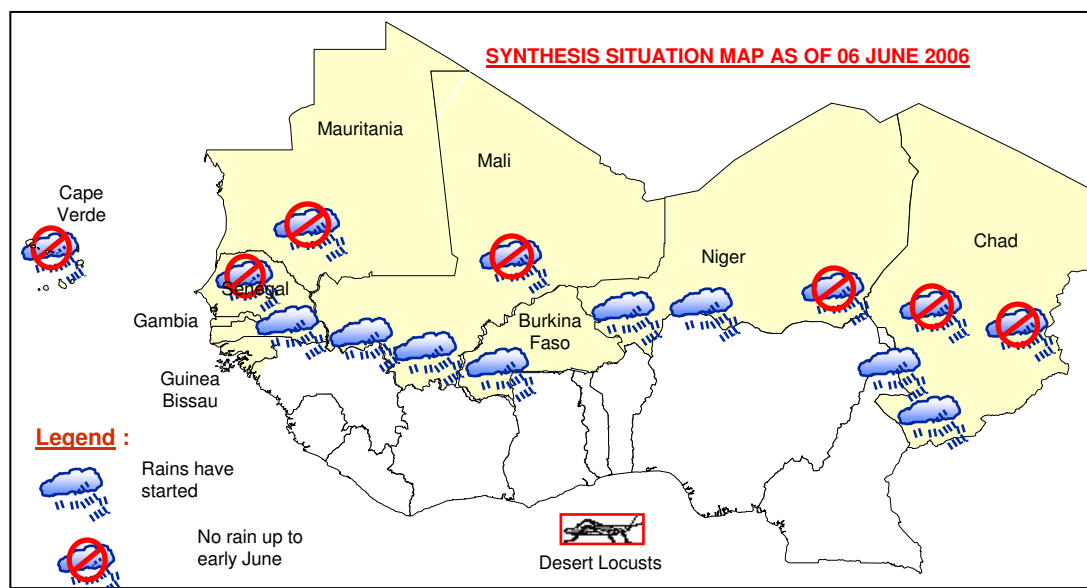
THE RAINY SEASON HAS STARTED AMID FOOD SECURITY CONCERNS IN PARTS OF THE SAHEL

SUMMARY

The rainy season has started in the Sahel. Seasonal rains commenced in May in southern **Burkina Faso**, **Chad**, **Mali**, **Niger** and the extreme south-east of **Senegal**. Seasonably dry conditions prevail in the rest of Senegal, **Cape Verde**, **The Gambia**, **Mauritania** and most of **Guinea-Bissau**. According to ACMAD's (African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development) seasonal Climate Prediction for 2006, there are higher probabilities that most of the Sahel region will experience "near-normal" to "above-normal" rainfall conditions during the period July-September (when the region receives about 80 percent of its annual precipitation).

Land preparation and planting are in progress following the onset of the rains. Seed availability is expected to be adequate in most countries, although localized shortages are likely in a few countries including Cape-Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Niger, where crop production was insufficient in some areas last year.

In spite of an overall satisfactory food supply situation, following a sharp recovery of cereal production in 2005 from the previous year's drought and locust affected harvest, serious localized food insecurity is reported in several countries. In Guinea-Bissau a failure of the 2005 rice crop in the southern regions of Quinara and Tombali, combined with market disruption in the cashew sector, the source of cash income for rural households, led to severe food difficulties in these regions. In Niger, high levels of acute malnutrition are still reported in parts of the country, while in Mauritania the hunger period reportedly came early this year for thousands of households due to insufficient cereal production in 2005 and a lack of income. In these countries and others, vulnerable groups need to be continuously monitored and assisted as necessary during the lean season.



SITUATION BY COUNTRY



BURKINA FASO

The cropping season has started. Seasonal rains commenced in May in the southern part of the country, allowing land preparation and planting to start.

Following the good 2005 cereal and cotton production, and the adequate food supply in neighbouring countries, household access to food has improved in marketing year 2005/06 (November/October). However, the severe food crisis of the previous year resulted in depletion of household assets including high livestock mortalities and indebtedness, notably in the northern part of the country, where very high malnutrition rates continue to be reported. Income generating and asset reconstitution interventions are recommended to support livelihoods in the affected communities during the lean season.



CAPE VERDE

Seasonably dry conditions prevail. Planting of maize normally starts in July with the onset of the rains on the main islands. Seed shortages are likely following the 2005 poor harvest.



CHAD

The cropping season has started in the Sudanian zone amid growing insecurity concerns in the East. Significant rains fell in the extreme south, where land preparation and planting of coarse grains have started. Following a record 2005 cereal crop, the overall food supply situation is satisfactory this marketing year (November/October).

However, increased insecurity in recent weeks has severely constrained humanitarian access to the Sudanese refugees who are living in the eastern part of the country. Moreover, insecurity in neighbouring Central African Republic has led to an influx of about 15 000 refugees over the last year, bringing the number of Central African refugees to over 45 000.



THE GAMBIA

Seasonably dry conditions prevail. The rains have not yet started and farmers are currently preparing their fields. Planting is expected to start in the weeks ahead with the onset of the rains. Seed availability is expected to be adequate following the 2005 good harvest.



GUINEA-BISSAU

Land preparation has started against a backdrop of a tight food situation in parts. Planting is expected to start in the weeks ahead with the onset of the rains. Area planted may be affected by seed shortage in the southern regions where the rice crop failed last year, as well as in the chronically food-deficit areas along the northern border with Senegal.

According to official sources, national cereal production is estimated to have increased significantly in 2005. However, in the southern regions of Quinara and Tombali heavy rains, floods and salination of irrigation channels resulted in a serious decline in rice output. The failure of the rice crop has been compounded by marketing problems in the cashew sector, the main source of cash income for rural households, leading to severe localized food insecurity and seed shortages. In northern parts, fighting and insecurity has led to the displacement of about 15 000 people in late March. In early May, the government appealed for US \$2 million to distribute seeds and food to the flood-affected populations, while UN agencies launched a joint appeal for over US \$ 3.6 million to assist the displaced populations in the north of

the country. Overall, the majority of the Guinea-Bissau population is facing chronic food insecurity, with a stagnant economy and 65 percent of the population living below the poverty line.



MALI

The cropping season has started. Land preparation is underway and first planting has started in the extreme south, following early rains in May. Planting will progress northwards following the onset of the rains.

Although the overall food supply position in 2006 is anticipated to remain satisfactory reflecting a good cereal harvest in the country and across the region, income generating and asset reconstitution activities are recommended during the lean season to support livelihoods in the communities hard hit by the 2005 food crisis.



MAURITANIA

Food assistance is needed for vulnerable groups during the lean season. Seasonably dry conditions prevail. Plantings of coarse grains will start following the onset of rains, which normally begin in July.

Cereal production recovered in 2005 after several years of poor harvests which have gradually eroded the rural population's coping strategies and led to a very difficult food situation. However, Mauritania is a food-deficit country whose production covers about half of the country's cereal utilisation needs in a normal year and food prices are strongly influenced by the exchange rate of the Ouguiya. The succession of crop failures and the very high food prices observed across the Sahel in 2005 have had a severe negative impact on household incomes and assets for large sections of the population. According to FEWSNET, the hunger period came early this year for about 100 000 households whose cereal production was not enough to cover current needs and which incurred high debts last year. Approximately 200 000 children are malnourished according to UNICEF. Therefore, vulnerable groups need to be continuously monitored and assisted, as necessary, during the lean season.



NIGER

The cropping season has started in the south amid concerns about food difficulties in parts of the country. Land preparation is underway and first planting has started in the extreme south, following early rains in May. Planting will progress northwards with the onset of the rains. Availability of seeds may be limited in parts of the country.

The overall food supply situation is anticipated to remain satisfactory in marketing year 2005/06 (November/October), due to increased cereal production in Niger and in neighbouring countries which usually export cereals to Niger, notably Nigeria, Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso. However, high levels of acute malnutrition are still reported across the country. Milk production is reported to remain below normal in the pastoral areas most affected by last year's crisis, which is likely to lead to further deterioration in the nutritional status of children over the course of the hunger season. Localized food insecurity remains also in other parts of the country and the situation could deteriorate further if adequate assistance is not provided during the lean season.

As recommended by the joint SAP/FAO/WFP/FEWSNET Mission which visited the country in October/November 2005, income generating and asset reconstitution activities are needed to support livelihoods of vulnerable people during the current lean season. These should include food-for-work and herd reconstitution schemes, therapeutic and feeding centres, school lunch programmes, cereal bank stocks, and micro-finance for income generating activities.



SENEGAL

Seasonably dry conditions prevail in most parts, although some rains fell in the extreme south-east in May. Rains are expected to start and progress towards the centre and the north in June.

In spite of good cereal production in 2005, localised food insecurity is reported in several regions of the country due mainly to marketing problems in the groundnut sector which is the main source of cash income for most rural households

This is the **first GIEWS report of the 2006 season on weather and crop conditions in the Sahelian countries of western Africa**. Geographical coverage of these reports includes the nine CILSS (Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel) member states: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. Reports are issued each month from June to October.

These reports are prepared with data from, and in close collaboration with, FAO Representatives, the Agro-Meteorology Group and the Environmental Monitoring Group (SDRN), the Emergency Centre for Locust Operations (ECLO), the Emergency Operations Service (TCEO), the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's). In this report, satellite imagery provided by FAO/ARTEMIS, field data on rainfall, FAO agro-meteorological crop monitoring field reports and information provided by FAO Representatives up to **31 May** have been utilized. The satellite images of the first dekad of June has also been utilized for final updating.

In these reports, reference will be made to four different **eco-climatic zones** based on the average annual precipitation and agricultural features, i.e. Sahelian zone, Sudano-Sahelian zone, Sudanian zone and Guinean zone:

Sahelian zone: Where average annual precipitation ranges between 250 and 500 mm. This zone is at the limit of perennial vegetation. In parts where precipitation is less than 350 mm, only pastures and occasional short-cycle drought-resistant cereal crops are grown; all cropping in this zone is subject to high risk.

Sudano-Sahelian zone: Where average annual precipitation ranges from 500 to 900 mm. In those parts of this zone where precipitation is less than 700 mm, mostly crops with a short growing cycle of 90 days are generally cultivated predominantly sorghum and millet.

Sudanian zone: Where average annual precipitation ranges from 900 to 1 100 mm. In this zone, most cereal crops have a growing cycle of 120 days or more. Most cereals, notably maize, root and cash crops are grown in this zone.

Guinean zone: Where average annual precipitation exceeds 1 100 mm. Guinea-Bissau and a small area of southern Burkina Faso belong to this zone, more suited to root crop cultivation.

Reference will also be made to the **Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ)**, also known by its trace on the earth's surface, called the **Intertropical Front**. The ITCZ is a quasi-permanent zone between two air masses separating the northern and southern hemisphere trade winds. The ITCZ moves north and south of the equator and usually reaches its most northerly position in July. Its position defines the northern limits of possible precipitation in the Sahel; rain-bearing clouds are generally situated 150-200 km south of the Intertropical Front.

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