SAHEL WEATHER AND CROP SITUATION REPORT

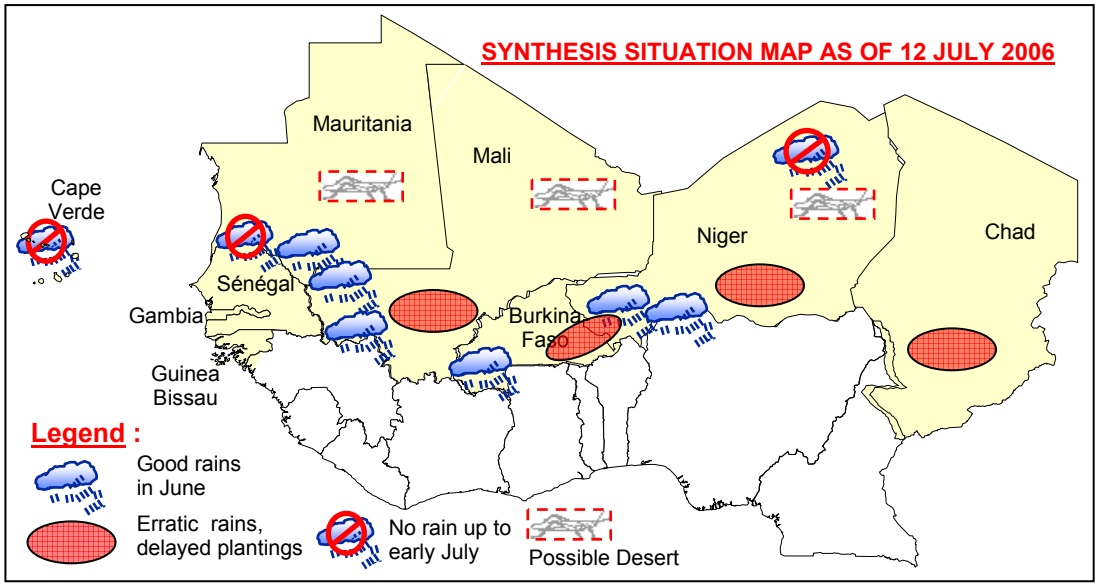
Report No. 2, 12 July 2006

ERRATIC RAINS HAVE DELAYED PLANTINGS AND CAUSED WATER STRESS IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES

SUMMARY

After the first rains in southern **Burkina Faso**, **Chad, Mali** and **Niger** in May, precipitation remained irregular and below normal in these countries until the third dekad of June. The erratic rains have stressed crops, and re-plantings were carried-out in several areas. Precipitation improved somewhat in Burkina Faso in end-June/early July, but dry weather conditions continue to delay plantings and to affect crops in other countries, notably in Niger, where yield potential may be seriously compromised if the situation does not improve in July. By contrast, crop growing conditions have been more favourable in the western part of the Sahel, where rains started in June. In **Guinea-Bissau**, **The Gambia, Mauritania** and **Senegal**, land preparation and plantings are in progress following the onset of the rains. Seasonably dry conditions continue to prevail only in **Cape Verde.** The Desert Locusts situation is calm but isolated adults were reported in Niger and are probably present in the summer breeding areas on the Sahel. Grasshoppers, army worms and grain-eating birds are also reported in a few countries.

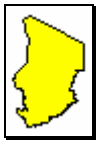
The overall food supply situation remains satisfactory in the subregion. However, serious localized food insecurity is reported in several countries, notably in Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Niger, due mostly to lack of access to food. In the latter country, 60 percent of the population is food insecure or at-risk according to the latest Vulnerability Assessment Survey done by the Government, jointly with FAO, FEWSNet and WFP. As a result, the Government has reportedly started subsidized sales of about 20 000 tonnes of cereal in vulnerable communities.



SITUATION BY COUNTRY

BURKINA FASO: The start of the rainy season was delayed in the centre. Although significant rains fell in May in the southern part of the country allowing land preparation and first plantings to start, dry weather conditions were still reported in late June in several regions of the country, notably in the centre-east and centre-north, raising concerns over the outcome of the cropping season. Precipitation improved somewhat in early July, but the performance of rainfall in the next few weeks will be decisive for the output of the season, because of delayed rains and earlier dry conditions. The overall food supply situation has remained satisfactory with relatively stable cereal prices since the beginning of the year.

CAPE VERDE: Seasonably dry conditions prevail. Planting of maize normally starts in July with the onset of the rains on the main islands. Seeds have been distributed to farmers with the assistance of an FAO emergency project, following the 2005 poor harvest.



CHAD: The start of the rainy season was somewhat erratic. Rainfall was generally irregular and below average in June. FEWSNet estimated rainfall totals since the beginning of June at 50 to 71 percent of normal, resulting in deficits of 50 to 100 mm. This resulted in crop failure in several regions, necessitating replantings. The overall food supply situation remains satisfactory, however, following a record 2005 cereal crop.

Increased insecurity continues to constrain 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 Republic refugees to over 45 000.

THE GAMBIA: The cropping season has started. The rains started in early June in the eastern part of the country allowing land preparation and first plantings. Precipitation covered the entire country during the third dekad but rainfall level remained significantly below average in the East, according to satellite imagery, which may have caused some replanting. Seed availability is expected to be adequate following the good 2005 harvest.

GUINEA-BISSAU: The rainy season started in early June. Land preparation and plantings of coarse grains and rainfed rice are underway. Coarse grain crops are emerging/tillering. Transplanting of swamp rice from seedbeds will take place in July/August after desalination of swamp rice fields. 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.

In spite of the good 2005 cereal production, the failure of the rice crop in the southern regions of Quinara and Tombali, combined with marketing problems in the cashew sector, the main source of cash income for rural households, have led to severe localized food insecurity and seed shortages in these regions. Furthermore fighting and insecurity have led to the displacement of about 15 000 people in the North in late March. WFP has launched an Emergency Operation to provide assistance to the IDPs through August. 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 start of the rains was somewhat erratic with below average precipitation recorded across the country through June, notably in Segou and Mopti, where cumulated June rainfall was estimated to be only 40 to 70 percent of normal, resulting in rainfall deficits of up to 100 mm. Plantings have been delayed in several regions and emerging crops will suffer water stress if rains do not improve in July.

Pastures have started regenerating in some areas but more regular rains are needed for a significant improvement in pasture conditions across the country. The Desert Locust situation is reported to be calm, but scattered adults may be present in parts of Timetrine, Tamesna, Tilemsi Valley and the Adrar des Iforas. Grasshopper infestations and the presence of grain-eating birds have also been reported in a few areas.

MAURITANIA: First rains in June permitted plantings to start in the south. The first significant rains were received in June in the extreme South. They permitted land preparation and planting to start. Elsewhere, seasonably dry conditions prevail. Pastures have started to regenerate in the South. The Desert Locust situation is reported to be calm, but scattered adults may be present in the South, notably in the two Hodhs.

The succession of crop failures that has affected the country in recent years and the very high food prices observed across the Sahel in 2005 have had a severe negative impact on household purchasing power and assets for large sections of the population. According to official sources, the Government is providing assistance to about 280 000 vulnerable people in Hodh Charghi and Vallée du Fleuve regions, and is planning to extend its intervention to other regions, including Wilaya du Nord, Wilaya du Centre and Nouakchott. In mid-June, however, WFP warned that its relief operation in Mauritania will face a complete break in supplies at the end of July when the country will be at the height of the hunger season, and appealed for urgent aid to assist vulnerable groups, as necessary, during the hunger season.

NIGER: The start of the rainy season was delayed with below average rains recorded in the country through early July. Only 36 percent of the villages have planted as of late June, compared to about 80 percent at the same time last year. The erratic rains have stressed crops and replantings were carried-out in several areas. A recovery in crop prospects will heavily depend on the performance of rainfall in July and the situation needs to be closely monitored. Infestations of grasshoppers, army worms and rodents are reported in a few locations, while isolated immature and mature adults of Desert Locusts are reported in the Air Mountain and in Tamesna regions.

In spite of the overall satisfactory food supply situation, 60 percent of the population is food insecure or at-risk according to the latest Vulnerability Assessment Survey done by the Government, jointly with FAO, FEWSNet and WFP. This is due mainly to the after-effects of the 2004-2005 food crisis that has had serious negative impact on household assets, income and nutritional status. By now, both food and cash reserves have become exhausted for the majority of families, food consumption has been sharply cut back, and sales of livestock and other few remaining assets have resumed. As a result, the Government has reportedly started subsidized sales of about 20 000 tonnes of cereal in vulnerable communities which have serious problems of access to food. Additional 5 000 tonnes will be distributed to most food insecure people. The situation needs to be very closely monitored.

SENEGAL: Rains reached the centre and the north in June. Following early rains in the extreme south-east in May, precipitation covered the centre and the north in June. Plantings of coarse grains are underway in the south and the centre, where crops are emerging. Pastures are starting to regenerate in the south, but overall pasture availability is still limited. Availability of seeds may be limited in parts of the country.

The overall food supply situation remains satisfactory. However, localized 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 second ***GIEWS report on 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 November.*

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 ***30 June*** *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. They are shown in the map on page 3 and described below:*

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 ***Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ)****, also known by its trace on the earth's surface, called the* ***Inter-Tropical 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 Inter-Tropical Front.*

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