SAHEL WEATHER AND CROP SITUATION REPORT

Report No. 3, 8 August 2006

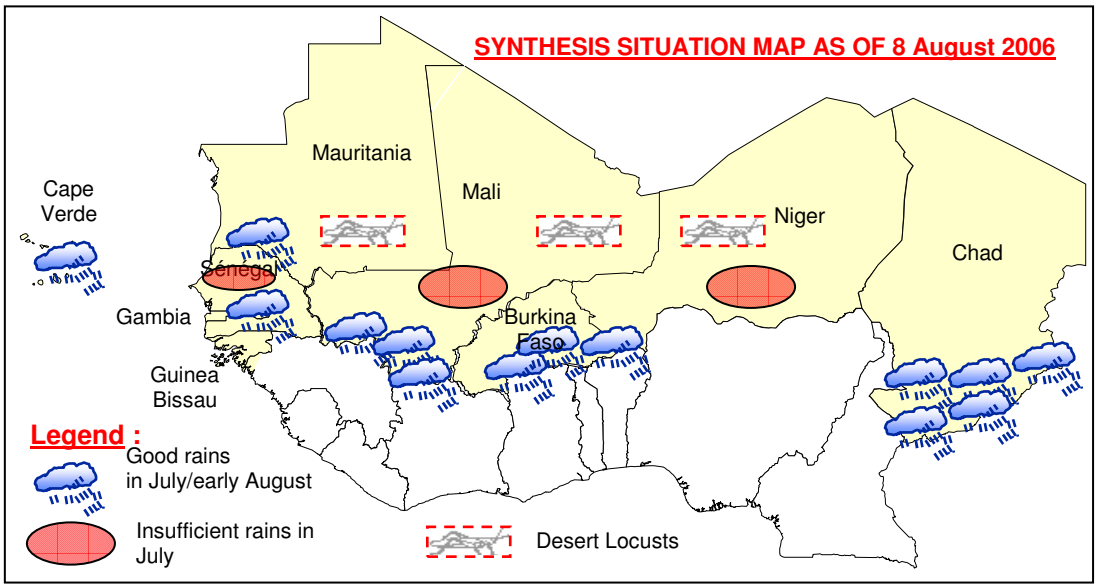
GROWING CONDITIONS IMPROVED IN EASTERN PARTS OF THE SAHEL BUT OVERALL CROP PROSPECTS REMAIN UNCERTAIN.

SUMMARY

Following the dry spell in June which affected growing crops, delayed plantings and raised serious concerns over the food supply outlook in the eastern part of the Sahel, precipitation resumed during the second dekad of July in most parts of **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali** and **Niger,** improving soil moisture conditions and crop prospects. However, in Niger, the most affected country, serious rainfall deficits persist in the agro-pastoral zones of Maradi, Zinder and Diffa in spite of improved precipitation in the past few weeks, and over 400 villages have not planted as of late July. Because of delayed rains and earlier dry conditions in Niger and other countries, rains will need to continue to October to allow crops to reach full maturity.

In the western part of the Sahel, where growing conditions have been more favourable, crops are growing satisfactorily in **The Gambia** and **Guinea-Bissau,** while improved rains in July permitted plantings in most producing zones of **Mauritania**. **Cape Verde** registered its first significant rains in early August. However, the start of the rainy season what somewhat erratic in **Senega**l, notably in the central and northern parts of the country, where plantings were delayed and replantings carried out in several regions.

Pastures are regenerating gradually. Grasshoppers, army worms and grain-eating birds are reported in several countries. The Desert Locusts situation is calm but isolated populations of solitary locusts are reported in southern Mauritania, northern Mali and Niger, where small-scale breeding is expected as the rains increase in these areas.



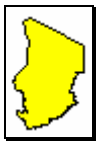
SITUATION BY COUNTRY

BURKINA FASO: Precipitation improved significantly in July, following erratic and below average rains until late June, which necessitated replantings in most regions and shortened the growing season, notably in the northern and Sahelien zones. Due to the erratic start of the rainy season, stages of development vary greatly in the regions and are generally late compared to normal years, except in the South-West, where maize, cotton, and beans crops are flowering. In the South, cereals are generally in the tillering/elonging stage, while they are emerging in the north. Due to the delayed rains and initial dry conditions, rains will need to continue to October to allow crops to reach full maturity.

Pastures have started regenerating in the South but more regular rains are needed for a significant improvement in pasture conditions, notably in the northern and Sahelian zones. The overall pest situation is reported to be calm; although some grain eating birds are reported in the Oudalan region, and army worms infestations reported in the Center-West, where treatments have been undertaken.

The overall food supply situation has remained satisfactory with relatively stable cereal prices since the beginning of the year, in spite of the late start of the rainy season. However, food reserves have reportedly become exhausted for the majority of families in Kinakoff and Déou (Sahel region) Banh and Solé (Loroum region) and Koumbri (Yatenga region), where the food situation needs to be closely monitored during the lean season.

CAPE VERDE: Significant rains in early August permitted wet planting in most agricultural islands. Following scattered and limited rains in late July, the first significant rains were registered during the first dekad of August, notably on the highlands of the agricultural islands. These rains permitted germination of dry plantings of maize which had been undertaken earlier as well as the start of wet plantings.



CHAD: Overall crop prospects have improved reflecting widespread rains in July. After irregular and below average rains in May and June that delayed plantings in the Sahelian zone, precipitation improved in mid-July and remained widespread and regular through early August. However, due to the late and erratic start of the rainy season, stages of development vary greatly in the regions and are generally late compared to normal years. In the Sudanian zone, millet and sorghum are generally in the tillering/elonging or elonging/heading stages, while maize crops are elonging. In the Sahelian zone, coarse grains are emerging or being planted. Pastures are generally adequate in the Sudanian zone, but remain poor in the Sahelian zones. The overall pest situation is calm.

The security situation in eastern Chad remains unstable and volatile, constraining humanitarian access to the Sudanese refugees who are living in the eastern part of the country.

THE GAMBIA: Adequate rains in July benefited crop development. Following first rains in early June which permitted land preparation and first plantings, precipitation covered the entire country during the third dekad and remained generally widespread and regular in July, according to satellite imagery. Reflecting these good rains, coarse grains and upland rice crops are developing satisfactorily.

GUINEA-BISSAU: Good growing conditions prevail allowing satisfactory crop development. Rains have been generally widespread and regular since the beginning of the cropping season, allowing adequate soil moisture and satisfactory crop development. Harvesting of early maturity varieties of maize may have started in the eastern regions of Afata and Gabu. Transplanting of swamp rice from seedbeds is underway after desalinisation of swamp rice fields.

MALI: Food crop area expanded at the expense of cotton area due to delayed and erratic rains. Precipitation remained irregular and below average until the third decade of July when above average rains were recorded in the centre, on the border with Mauritania, in the East of Mopti and the southern parts of Tombouctou and Gao. Cumulative decadal rainfall at the end of July was still below average in the East of Kayes and Koulikoro and in Tombouctou, Gao and Kidal. Due to the erratic start of the rainy season, stages of development vary greatly in the regions, from planting of coarse grains and transplanting of rice, to leafing of maize and heading of cotton and pulses. According to the preliminary results of the mid-term assessment carried out by the Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire, the area planted with coarse grains (millet, sorghum, maize) as of late July increased by 9 percent compared to the same period last year, with millet area experiencing the highest increase (nearly 33 percent), while rice and cotton areas decreased by 24 percent and 10 percent respectively. Although these estimates are very provisional because planting of rice and coarse grains is still underway, they suggest that the impact of the irregular rains on national food availability and on household's income and food security need to be carefully analysed and assessed.

Pastures have improved significantly in the main agro-pastoral zones of Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso and Ségou, but remain poor in the centre, the western part of the Sahelian zone and the North. The Kidal region is particularly affected. As regards the pest situation, infestations of grasshoppers, grain eating birds, army worms, rodents and other pests were reported in several areas. Surveys have been undertaken over an area of about 314269 hectares, of which about 10166 hectares were treated. The desert locust situation is reported to be calm but scattered adults are likely to be present in the north with small-scale breeding expected. The overall food supply situation has remained satisfactory with relatively stable cereal prices since the beginning of the year, in spite of the late start of the rainy season

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MAURITANIA: Increased rains from mid-July permitted plantings in most agricultural zones. Following first rains in June in the extreme south which permitted land preparation and planting to start, precipitation improved significantly from mid-July, and rains had been received by the end of the month in most of southern Mauritania. Heavy rains and floods in the Centre-west on 22 July caused considerable casualties in several localities, notably in Boutilimit. Although, cumulated rainfall was still below the long term climatological mean, plantings are well underway in most agricultural zones. Pastures are regenerating, improving livestock condition. There were reports of isolated solitary mature adults during the third decade of July in parts of Inchiri, Assaba and the two Hodhs, and small-scale breeding may occur in areas of recent rainfall.

NIGER: Rains improved since mid-July but overall crops prospects remain uncertain. Following erratic and below average rains until mid-July, which necessitated replantings in most regions and shortened the growing season, precipitation has improved significantly since mid-July in most areas. However, important rainfall deficits persist in the agro-pastoral zones of Maradi, Zinder and Diffa in spite of improved precipitation in the past few weeks, and over 400 villages have not planted as of late July. Due to the erratic start of the rainy season, stages of development vary greatly in the regions and are generally late compared to normal years. Millet, sorghum and rainfed rice are generally emerging, but millet is in the heading stage in some areas of Dosso, Maradi and Zinder. Due to the delayed rains and initial dry conditions, rains will need to continue to October to allow

crops to reach full maturity. The Desert Locusts situation is calm but isolated populations of solitary adults are reported in Tamesna and Air Mountains, where small-scale breeding is expected as the rains increase in these areas

Crop production is likely to decrease this year, but the extent of the decline will depend on the rainfall pattern through October. Most of the villages that have not planted so far are located in the agro- pastoral zones which contain the highest proportion of poor and chronic food insecure people in the country. The populations in these zones are particularly vulnerable to production and prices shocks. Rainfall pattern in the next few weeks need to be very closely monitored in these areas.

SENEGAL: Early crop prospects are uncertain reflecting late and limited rains in the centre and the north until late July. Following early rains in the extreme south-east in May, precipitation progressed slowly to the centre. Rains were irregular in much of Senegal's groundnut basin and mostly dry conditions still prevailed in some northern regions such as Matam. Saint-Louis received its first rains during the third dekad of July. Plantings were delayed and replantings carried out in several regions including Kolda, Tamba, Bakel, Kaolak, Diourbel and Matam. Stages of development of crops and pasture's condition vary greatly in the regions, reflecting the erratic start of the rainy season. Pastures are generally good in Ziguinchor region, but remain poor in the south-east, the centre and the North.

*This is the third **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 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 July** have been utilized. The satellite images of the first dekad of September 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 **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 northernly 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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