SAHEL WEATHER AND CROP SITUATION REPORT

Report No. 1, 18 July 2007

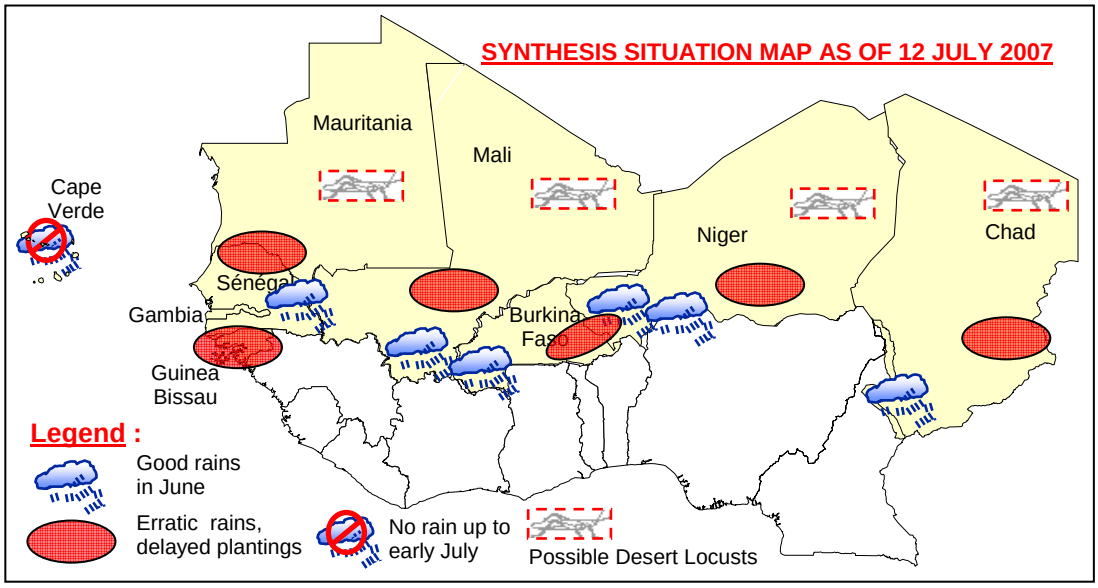
THE ONSET OF THE CROPPING SEASON WAS DELAYED OVER MOST OF THE SAHEL

SUMMARY

Following an early start of rains in May in the eastern part of the Sahel, precipitation remained irregular in **Burkina Faso**, **Chad, Mali** and **Niger** until the third dekad of June. Plantings were delayed and replantings carried out in several areas due to the erratic rains. Although precipitation improved somewhat in end-June/early July, the rainy season is not well established yet and yield potential may be compromised in several areas if rainfall does not improve significantly in the following few weeks.

In western Sahel, where the cropping season usually starts later, the situation is not much better. Although some rains fell in June over **Guinea-Bissau**, **The Gambia, Mauritania** and **Senegal**, satellite rainfall estimates indicate that most of these countries are experiencing significant deficits which may affect plantings and crop development if rainfall conditions do not improve in July[1]. Seasonably dry conditions continue to prevail in **Cape Verde** where the rainy season usually starts in July. The Desert Locust situation is calm but small scale breeding is expected to start with the onset of the rains in southern Mauritania, northern Niger and Mali, and eastern Chad.

Although localised food insecurity is reported in few countries, notably in **Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania** and **Niger** due mostly to insecurity and lack of access, the food supply situation remains generally satisfactory in most parts of the subregion reflecting the bumper 2006 cereal harvest.



[1] Nevertheless, overall rainfall during the cropping season is expected to be adequate according to the seasonal rainfall forecast carried out by the ACMAD (African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development) and the Agrhymet Centre. For the Sahel which receives about 80 percent of its annual precipitation in the months July-September, there is an increased probability this year of normal to above-normal rainfall. Therefore, precipitation is expected to improve in the months ahead over most of the subregion.

SITUATION BY COUNTRY

BURKINA FASO: The start of the cropping season was delayed in most regions. Although significant rains fell in May in a few areas in the southern part of the country, allowing land preparation and first plantings to start, the onset of the cropping season was delayed and replantings carried out in several regions of the country due to erratic rains through late June. 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 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 rains on the main islands. Seeds have been distributed by the Government to farmers in the areas that had poor harvests last year.

CHAD: The start of the rainy season was delayed in the east. Rainfall has been generally irregular and below average in the eastern part of the country where estimated rainfall totals since the beginning of May were put at 50 to 80 percent of normal. Several areas experienced crop failures necessitating replantings.

The overall food supply situation remains satisfactory, following a record 2006 cereal crop. Nevertheless, access to food continues to be very difficult for large segments of the population, notably in the eastern part of the country where poor security situation continues to disrupt marketing activities, limiting flows of commodities between regions and leading to food price spikes in some areas. The IDPs, whose number was estimated to reach over 140 000 as of late May, are among the most vulnerable populations.

THE GAMBIA: Erratic and below average rains at the onset of the cropping season may delay plantings. Although the country received some rains in June, satellite rainfall estimates indicate significant rainfall deficits which may delay plantings and cause some replantings if soil moisture conditions do not improve in July.

GUINEA-BISSAU: Lack of rainfall delayed plantings. According to satellite imagery, precipitation has been erratic and below average since the beginning of the season, which may have affected land preparation and plantings of coarse grains and rainfed rice.

In the cashew sector, the main source of cash income for rural households, continued marketing problems threaten food security among the most vulnerable population. Proceeds from sale of cashews enable farmers to supplement their own food production by buying imported rice. In 2006, high purchase prices for cashews set by the Government inhibited traders from their normal buying, triggering localized severe food insecurity in several areas. Prevailing low international prices combined with continuing Government intervention may exacerbate the problem this year.

MALI: The start of the rains was somewhat erratic with below average precipitation recorded across the country through June resulting in significant rainfall deficits, except in Sikasso, northern Koulikoro and eastern Gao. Plantings have been delayed in several regions and emerging crops will suffer water stress if rains do not improve in July. As of June 20th , only 16 percent of millet planting target was achieved compared to 38.63 percent by the same date last year. For cotton the numbers are 32.78 percent and 70.15 percent respectively. The cotton crop, which should be planted before July 20th to maximize yield potential, is particularly at risk.

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 small scale breeding is expected to start with the onset of the rains in the northeast (Tamesna, Tilemsi Valley and the Adrar des Iforas), causing locust numbers to increase slightly in the months aheads.

MAURITANIA: Seasonal dry conditions persisted in most producing areas in June. Light rains were received in June in the extreme South but the rainy season which normally occurs in July, has not started yet. The Desert Locust situation is reported to be calm but small scale breeding is expected to start with the onset of rains in the South causing locust numbers to increase slightly in the months ahead.

Mauritania is a food import dependent country whose domestic production covers less than 40 percent of total food requirement in a normal year. The country relies heavily on coarse grain (millet and sorghum) imports from neighbouring Senegal and Mali, and wheat imports from the international market. Consequently, food prices are a key determinant of access to food for the majority of Mauritanians. The country is facing a tight food situation this year due mostly to the relatively high prices of coarse grains and wheat, reflecting poor harvest in Mauritania and Senegal and increasing wheat price on the international market. The succession of crop failures that has affected the country in recent years has had severe negative impact on rural households purchasing power and increased their vulnerability to food production shocks. Market conditions and the situation of vulnerable groups need to be continuously monitored in order to provide assistance as necessary.

NIGER: The start of the rainy season was delayed with below average rains recorded in the country through early July. Only 57 percent of the villages have planted as of late June (similar to last year where rains were also very late) compared to about 80 percent at the same time in 2005. The erratic rains have delayed plantings, 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.

SENEGAL: Rains reached the centre and the north in mid-June, following early rains in the extreme south-east in May. However, a dry spell from mid-June through early July led to significant moisture deficits in parts of the country which may affect emerging crops.

The overall food supply situation is satisfactory, although localized food insecurity is reported, notably in the areas that have experienced sharp drops in production last year as a result of insufficient rainfall and inadequate supply of inputs.

*This is the first **GIEWS report on the 2007 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 (NRCB), the Emergency Centre for Locust Operations (ECLO), the Emergency Operations Service (TCEO) 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 have 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 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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