SAHEL WEATHER AND CROP SITUATION REPORT

Report No. 3 13 September 2007

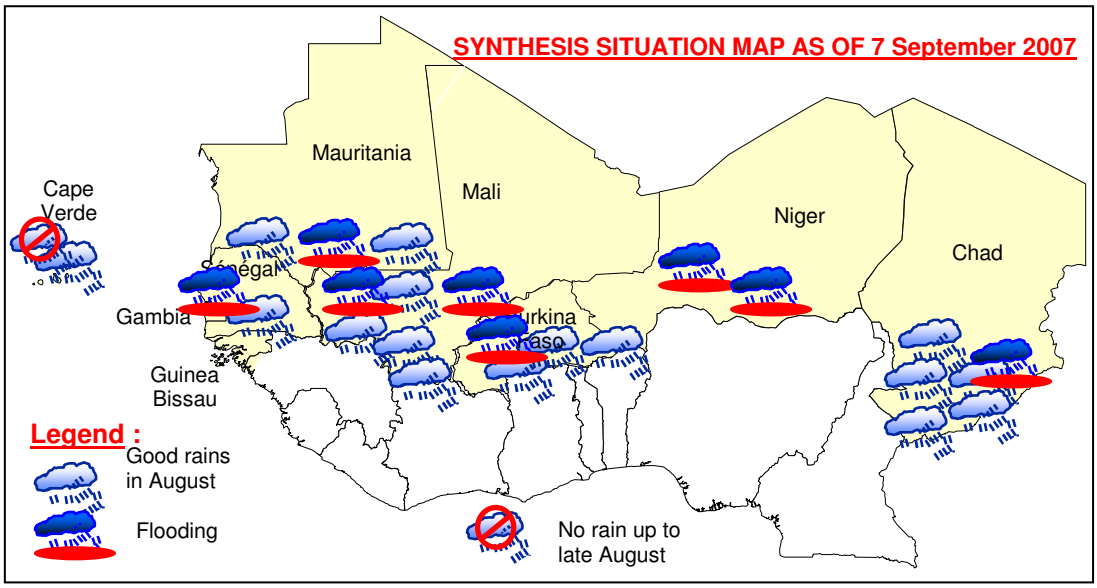
FLOODS CAUSED DAMAGE IN MOST COUNTRIES BUT INCREASED RAINS IN AUGUST IMPROVE CROP PROSPECTS

SUMMARY

Following below-normal rains in June and July in several parts of the Sahel, precipitation improved significantly in August over the main producing areas, thus reconstituting soil water reserves, providing relief to stressed crops and improving crop prospects in most countries. Heavy rains and floods caused considerable human casualties and damage to crops in several countries, notably in **Burkina Faso**, **Chad**, The **Gambia**, **Mali**, **Mauritania**, **Niger** and **Senegal.** However, in the areas affected by earlier dry conditions, yield potential will be reduced and late plantings or replanting will need rains late in the season to cover their entire growing cycle. **Cape Verde** is the only country where persistent dry conditions continued to be experienced in most producing areas through late August.

From West to East, crop prospects are unfavourable in **Cape Verde** due to delayed rains. In **The Gambia**, **Guinea-Bissau** and **Mauritania** satellite imagery indicates that increased precipitation in August benefited crops and pastures but good rains need to continue through October to allow them to reach full maturity. In **Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad,** harvest prospects improved significantly after the scant rains of June. Satellite imagery for early September indicates that good rains continued to fall over most of the Sahel region.

The food supply situation remains generally satisfactory in most parts of the subregion. However, thousands of people have been made homeless by the floods and are in urgent need of food and non-food assistance.

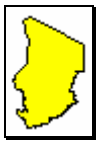


SITUATION BY COUNTRY

BURKINA FASO: Harvest prospects improved significantly following widespread and above-normal rains in August, but floods caused severe localised damage. After erratic and below average rains until late June, which necessitated replanting in most regions and shortened the growing season, precipitation has increased significantly from mid-July, and remained abundant in August. Substantial flooding was reported in western, northern and centre-western regions of the country. A joint FAO/Government assessment mission that visited these regions in late August/early September estimated that there has been considerable localised damage with about 22 212 ha of crops flooded at the national level. Significant level of animal loss was also reported. In addition to emergency food and non-food assistance the mission recommended the implementation of activities that permit affected households to produce food and generate income during the off-season (December-February) and access herd reconstitution schemes.

In spite of the current heavy rains, stages of crop development vary by regions and are generally late compared to normal years due to the erratic start of the rainy season. Except in few regions where cereals are at heading or flowering stage, millet and sorghum are generally in the elongating stage. Due to the delayed rains and initial dry conditions, rains will need to continue through October to allow crops to reach full maturity. Pastures have regenerated significantly countrywide. The overall pest situation is reported to be calm.

CAPE VERDE: persistent dry conditions continued to be experienced on most producing islands through late August. Planting of maize normally starts in July and this year's cereal production is likely to be seriously affected regardless of weather conditions during the rest of the season. Although the country imports the bulk of its consumption requirement also in a year of normal production, the rural population, particularly in the semi-arid zones, could be severely affected.



CHAD: Growing conditions remain mostly favourable. Rains in August were abundant and widespread after irregular and below average precipitation delayed plantings in parts. Although overall crop prospects are favourable, insecurity has constrained access to inputs in the eastern part of the country with potential negative impact on production in some areas.

The overall food supply situation remains satisfactory. Nevertheless, access to food continues to be difficult for large segments of the population, notably in the East where poor security situation continues to disrupt marketing activities and limiting flows of commodities between regions. The situation has been compounded by recent heavy rains and floods that have reportedly washed out several camps and limited humanitarian access to Chadians IDPs and refugees from Sudan's Darfur region.

THE GAMBIA: Early crop prospects are mixed. The start of the cropping season was late and rains have been irregular in most regions. Although remote sensing rainfall estimates indicate significant improvement in August, crops and pastures will need rains late in the season to cover their entire growing cycle.

GUINEA-BISSAU: The late onset of rains has extended the length and severity of the hunger season. Although satellite imagery indicates that more rains fell in August providing some relief to crops and pastures, yield potential has been seriously compromised in several areas following the long delay of rains that has affected transplanting of rice from seedbeds to swamp.

As a result, the lean season has been extended for vulnerable populations who are already suffering the compounded effects of continued marketing problems in the cashew sector, the main source of cash income for rural households, and increased rice price on the international market.

MALI: Harvest prospects improved significantly reflecting abundant and widespread rains in August but floods caused severe localised damage. Precipitation remained generally widespread and abundant in August and crops are generally developing satisfactorily although heavy rains have damaged crops in a few areas, notably in Kayes, Segou and Mopti regions. Stages of development of crops vary significantly, due to the late and erratic start of the rainy season. For coarse grains, stages of development vary from tillering to flowering, while transplanting of irrigated rice is still underway. In the areas affected by earlier dry conditions, yield potential will be reduced and late plantings and replanting will need rains until October to cover their entire growing cycle.

According to the results of the mid-term assessment carried out by the Government, the area planted with cotton decreased by over 38 percent compared to last year, while millet and sorghum area increased by about 22 percent. About 2 538 300 ha of coarse grain have been planted in 2007 compared to about 2 148 475 ha in 2006. Although these estimates are very provisional, 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 are generally good. Grain-eating birds are reported in Mopti and Gao, while grasshopper infestations are reported in the pastures of Bandiagara, Douentza, Ansongo and Ménaka. The desert locust situation is calm.

MAURITANIA: Increased rains from early August permitted plantings in most agricultural zones but floods caused damage in parts. After a one-month delay in the onset of the cropping season, precipitation improved significantly in August and rains had been received by the end of the month in most of southern Mauritania, except in Tiris and Inchiri western regions. Heavy rains and floods in the southeastern town of Tintane in early August and the southern regions of Gorgol and Assaba at the end of the month caused considerable casualties and damage to crops and livestock in several localities. Although planting has progressed well in most producing regions, early crop prospects are mixed because most rainfed crops planted in early August have been flooded as well as irrigated areas in Gorgol and Guidimakha.

Pastures are regenerating, improving livestock condition but continuing dry conditions in the West are affecting pastoralists in the area. There were reports of isolated solitary mature adults of desert locusts in August in a few places in the southeast and small-scale breeding may occur in areas of recent rainfall.

NIGER: Growing conditions remained favourable in August and harvest prospects are favourable in spite of floods. Good rains from July through August remained widespread over the main producing areas in early September. Crops are developing satisfactorily. As regards the pest situation, infestations of grasshoppers, green flies and injurious insects are reported on crops in most agricultural regions and ground and air treatments have been undertaken. The Desert Locusts situation is calm but isolated solitary adults are reported in the southeast. Scattered adults are also likely to be present and breeding in parts of Tamesna and the Air Mountains where small-scale breeding is expected to occur, causing locust numbers to increase slightly.

Although heavy rains and floods caused considerable casualties and damaged crops in a few localities, notably in Zinder, Agadez and Tahoua, a good harvest is expected. However, due to the delayed rains and initial dry conditions, rains will need to continue through October to allow crops to reach full maturity countrywide.

The food supply situation has improved with the beginning of harvesting in the country along with increased cereal imports from neighbouring coastal countries. Nevertheless, persistent insecurity in northern Agadez region may disrupt marketing activities and limit flows of commodities between the food deficit North and the South, which may have serious food security implications.

SENEGAL: Crop prospects improved, reflecting increased rains in August. Following irregular and insufficient rains in most parts of the country at the beginning of the cropping season, precipitation increased significantly in August over the main producing areas, thus reconstituting soil water reserves and improving crop prospects. Satellite imagery for late August/early September indicated that crops continued to benefit from good rains. However, as plantings were delayed and replanting carried out in several regions including Diourbel, Louga, Tambacounda and Fatick, crops and pastures will need rains late in the season to cover their entire growing cycle.

*This is the third **GIEWS report on the 2007 season on weather and crop conditions in the Sahelian countries of western Africa**. Geographic 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 September.*

*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 August** have been utilized. The satellite images of the first dekad of September 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 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 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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