Cereal production estimated well below average in 2021

Harvesting of the 2021 cereal crops concluded in December. The aggregate cereal production in 2021 is officially estimated at 3.5 million tonnes, nearly 40 percent below the five-year average. The sharp production shortfall is mostly due to the combined effects of unfavourable weather conditions, pest attacks and the deterioration of the security situation that resulted in a significant decline of yields and plantings.

The uneven temporal distribution of seasonal rains hampered the establishment and development of millet and sorghum crops across the main producing areas in the western and central parts of the country. The early cessation of rains in September negatively affected crops at critical flowering and grain filling stages, resulting in a sharp decline of yields. Pest attacks also contributed to the poor production outcome. Furthermore, increased violence in the Liptako-Gourma area and the Lake Chad Basin, limited access to fields and constrained the availability of inputs and labour, forcing many households to reduce the planted area and/or abandon their crops in the fields.

The unfavourable weather conditions also resulted in a deterioration of grasslands conditions and intense bushfires destroyed localized areas of pasture. The reduced availability of pastures and forage led to an earlier-than-normal transhumance towards croplands, which resulted in an increase in intercommunal conflicts. The upsurge of violence throughout 2021 continued to limit the access to pastoral resources, curbing local production and raising the likelihood of an early start of the pastoral lean season in 2022 that usually starts in mid-March.

As part of the Emergency Plan launched by the country, FAO is supporting about 36 500 households with the provision of agricultural inputs for off-season crops, animal feed and vaccination for boosting livestock body conditions and cash transfers targeting rural households involved in the restoration of
Above-average cereal import requirements forecast in 2021/22

The country relies on cereal imports to cover its consumption needs and, in the previous five years, imported on average 475,000 tonnes, mostly of rice and wheat. Reflecting the substantial shortfall in domestic production of coarse grains in 2021, a large drawdown of stocks and increased needs for external supplies are estimated in order to prevent a significant decrease in the food consumption. Therefore, in the 2021/22 marketing year (November/October), the cereal import requirements are estimated at about 740,000 tonnes, 20 percent above the previous year and about 55 percent above the five-year average.

The country, however, might not be able to meet the entire import requirements as trade flows are likely to be constrained by cross-border restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability in the subregion as well as export bans of cereals in neighbouring countries.

Prices of coarse grains at high levels

Following declines in September and October, underpinned by the start of the main harvest, prices of locally produced sorghum and millet generally levelled off or increased in November and December 2021. In December, average prices of local sorghum and millet were about 25 percent higher than a year before, largely reflecting the effects of the reduced cereal output in 2021, the increased transportation costs and the disruption of markets due to the deterioration of security conditions. Prices of imported rice remained virtually unchanged in recent months and, as of last December, they were slightly below the values of one year earlier, reflecting overall adequate supplies.

Prevalence of food insecurity projected to increase sharply in 2022

The food security situation continued to deteriorate in 2021, reaching alarming levels particularly in conflict-affected Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin areas. The frequency and severity of intercommunal disputes and violent incidents by non-state armed groups increased in 2021 compared to the previous year. The upsurge of violence has disrupted agricultural livelihoods, labour migration and the delivery of humanitarian food assistance, constraining availability of and access to food. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of December 2021, the number of internally displaced persons was estimated at about 265,000. Due to conflicts in neighbouring countries, the country also hosts about 250,000 refugees, mostly from Nigeria and Mali.

According to the latest “Cadre Harmonisé (CH)” analysis, about 2.56 million people were estimated to face acute food insecurity (CH Phase 3 [Crisis] and above) during the post-harvest period, between October and December 2021. This level is well above the 1.23 million people assessed to be food insecure during the same period in 2020 and it reflects the worsening situation in terms of food access and availability. Of particular concern, about 140,000 people were estimated to be in CH Phase 4 (Emergency), well above the 62,000 people estimated in 2020.

In the upcoming lean season period, between June and August 2022, a projected 3.62 million people are at risk to face
food insecurity, of which 300,000 in CH Phase 4 (Emergency). This is a 40 percent increase compared to the current post-harvest period, underpinned by the reduced cereal production in 2021, high food prices and the high likelihood of persisting disruptions of markets and agricultural activities amid increasing insecurity.

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