Timely start of 2021 cropping season

Following a timely onset of seasonal rains in late March, planting operations for paddy rice, the major cereal grown in the country, are underway in the main producing areas in the South, in some parts of Eastern uplands and in riverine areas. The harvest is expected to start from September. Cumulative rainfall amounts have been average to above average, supporting the development of early planted crops. While planting activities will continue until end-July, the crops already in place are at sprouting, seedling and tillering stages in most planted areas and weeding activities are regularly underway. In the most northern and northwestern areas of the country, land preparation activities are presently underway, for planting maize, millet and sorghum crops in May. The harvests are expected to start in October.

The latest Forum of the Agro-Hydro-Climatic Seasonal Forecast in Sudano-Sahelian Africa (PRESASS) points to above-average rainfall amounts during the July-September period, with a likely positive impact on crop yields and availability of pasture and water for livestock.

Forage availability is currently satisfactory in the main grazing areas of the country, allowing animals to maintain good body conditions and enhance their market value. The return of livestock from transhumance from lowland areas of the northern parts of the country occurred in March. The health situation remains overall good and stable, with just some localized outbreaks of seasonal diseases, including Peste des petits Ruminants, worms and foot rot in sheep and goats, Foot and Mouth as well as Trypanosomiasis in Koinadugu, Bombali, Kambia, Tonkolili and Kono districts in cattle and Newcastle in poultry.
Below-average cereal production harvested in 2020

Despite the intervention of the Government and its partners to provide inputs to farmers, the 2020 national cereal production is estimated at 1.1 million tonnes, 17 percent below the average. The decline in production is mainly explained by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures implemented to control it on the availability of farm labour and inputs.

Import requirements for the 2020/21 marketing year (November/October) are forecast at an above-average level of 600 000 tonnes as local traders are aiming to replenish their stocks.

Food prices at significantly high levels

The supply of major commodities is generally satisfactory in most markets in the country due to regular import flows. However, field reports indicate that prices of locally produced food increased since the beginning of 2021 and are significantly above the level of a year earlier. This is mainly due to the general inflation situation in the country, the effects of the COVID-19 restrictions on the movement of goods from surplus producing areas to areas with high demand and the weakening of the local currency.

According to Statistics Sierra Leone, the year on year food inflation is estimated at 15.45 percent in March 2021, compared to 9.9 percent one year before. The current large trade deficit is exerting downward pressure on the exchange rate, which weakened from SLL 9 600 per US dollar in early 2020 to about SLL 10 200 per US dollar in early 2021.

Continued assistance needed for most food insecure households

According to the March 2021 “Cadre Harmonisé” analysis, about 1.5 million people is estimated to need food assistance from March to May 2021, up from 1 million people estimated in March to May 2020. This number is expected to increase to 1.7 million people during the lean period from June to August 2021, if no mitigation actions are taken. The main drivers of the food insecurity are the effects of adverse weather events (flooding), Fall Armyworm attacks on maize in some localized areas, high inflation rate, weakening local currency and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the value chain.

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