



COMMUNIQUÉ on the 2019-20 agricultural outlook and food prospects for the Sahel and West Africa

Regional technical consultation REGIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF FOOD CRISES (PREGEC)

“The 2019-2020 agro-pastoral season foretells overall average or good food crop production. On the other hand, fodder production is reportedly low in the Western Sahel and in some parts in the Centre and East.”

The September PREGEC meeting conducted a half-term assessment of the 2019-20 agricultural campaign. The meeting was organised by the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and its partners.

Members of the regional crisis prevention and management system (PREGEC) met in Accra, Ghana, from 18 to 20 September 2019 to review the progress of the agro-pastoral season and discuss agricultural and food prospects.

1. In preparation for the cropping season, the States and their partners provided farmers and pastoralists with agricultural and veterinary inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, vaccines and deworming products, as well as farm equipment. Food and humanitarian assistance operations have also been implemented to assist food and nutrition insecure populations and those affected by floods in some countries, especially in Guinea, Mali and Niger.
2. Apart from the normal to late season onset observed in the Western Atlantic seaboard, the rainfall situation was marked by relatively long dry spells recorded after the start of the season in parts of the Sahelian zone. Then, from the end of July, the rainfall conditions improved significantly. Given the current position of the Inter-tropical Front, a late end of the rainy season is expected, as announced in the seasonal forecasts at the beginning of the cropping season.
3. In hydrological terms, river flows in major river basins have experienced significant peaks, resulting in overflows in several places and resulting in loss of life and livelihoods of the populations. For example, the Niamey station in the Niger River has reached water levels never seen during the last 50 years. This situation could augur well for good recession and off-season cropping as well as livestock watering.
4. On the agricultural front, the onset of the cropping season was generally early in the Centre and East and relatively normal or late in the Western Sahel. The level of satisfaction of crop water requirements is generally good, except in northern Senegal, south-western Mauritania and some areas in western Mali. Thus, most cereal crops and legumes are currently at seed-setting, heading or maturation stages. In some areas, early harvesting of millet, cowpea, groundnuts and Bambara groundnuts is underway. In the coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea, the main rainy season harvests are also underway for maize and yams. If the late end of the season were confirmed, the region could expect agricultural production equivalent to or above the five-year average.
5. On the phyto-sanitary level, the situation is marked by attacks by millet stem borers, mainly in Niger and by fall armyworm (FAW) outbreaks to varying degrees in all countries of the region, except Mauritania. The Desert Locust situation remains calm in all the summer breeding areas of the western region, with low numbers of locusts despite the favourable ecological conditions for locust development in their survival and reproduction areas. However, grasshopper invasions remain a concern in Cabo Verde, where an emergency has been declared. Moreover, grain-eating birds are still threatening cereal crops in Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Mauritania and Chad.

6. In view of the rainy season situation, expected cereal production could be between 69 and 76 million metric tonnes, depending on the assumptions used to assess such production, i.e. pessimistic or optimistic assumptions. Compared with the production of last year and the last five-year average, changes are -5 and 12% under low assumptions and 5 and 17% under optimistic assumptions. As for the production of roots and tubers, it could be between 186 and 194 million metric tonnes under both assumptions. These projections correspond to variations of -2 and 14% under pessimistic assumptions and 2 to 19% under optimistic assumptions respectively, compared to last year and the last five-year average.

7. On the pastoral level, unfavourable conditions for fodder production are observed in western Mali, in parts of Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and especially western Mauritania and northern Senegal. In addition, the areas of Senegal and Mauritania recorded their 3rd consecutive year of fodder production deficit. There are also persistent difficulties in accessing natural pasture due to insecurity prevailing in parts of Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Chad. This situation could affect the household livelihoods in the areas concerned and lead to early departures of livestock in transhumance, with consequences in both transit and host areas.

8. In agricultural markets, the lean season was marked by an unusual fall in cereal prices in the Eastern and Central Basins due to good commercial and farmer stock levels following the good harvests of the last two years' cropping seasons and good harvest prospects for the current season. These declines are also related to the market disruption caused by the prevailing security crisis. However, in some Western Basin countries affected by inflation, particularly in Sierra Leone and Liberia, staple food prices have risen significantly. In the conflict zones of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad, market disruption makes it difficult for vulnerable households to access staple foods. Similarly, the temporary situation of the closing of Nigeria's borders with Benin and Niger seriously affects trade in agricultural products, especially market gardening products, with consequences on the livelihoods and incomes of farmers.

9. In livestock markets, cattle and small ruminant prices are generally stable, with an upward trend compared to the five-year average except for cattle prices in Niger. The terms of trade for livestock relative to cereals are broadly in favour of pastoralists as a result of the significant drop in cereal prices.

10. Despite the prospects of generally average to good agricultural production, the persistent security crisis (terrorist attacks and inter-community conflicts) is a factor aggravating the food and nutrition vulnerability of households, particularly in Northern and Eastern Burkina Faso, Northern and Central Mali,

Eastern and Western Niger, North-eastern Nigeria and the North and Lake Chad Region. While undermining the livelihoods of households (agricultural activities, access to pasture), the security crisis also causes significant disruptions of markets and humanitarian assistance interventions, the malfunction of basic social services, particularly the closure of many schools and health centres. At the end of the regional technical consultation meeting, participants made the following recommendations:

11. At the end of the regional technical consultation meeting, participants made the following recommendations:

To countries,

- Anticipate the planning and implementation of off-season agro-pastoral production projects;
- Set up mechanisms to facilitate the collection of information on the food security of populations in inaccessible or limited access areas due to the security crisis there;
- Strengthen the capacity of national systems to maintain information monitoring in risk areas, particularly those affected by low agricultural and biomass production, while continuing efforts to finance food and nutrition security information systems;
- Build the capacity of the national services in charge of fighting the fall armyworm;
- Anticipate the planning of cross-border transhumance campaigns in the Sahelian countries of departure and the coastal host countries, including the strengthening of dialogue mechanisms and assistance actions in pastoral areas under high pressure.

To the three IGOs (ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS),

- Continue capacity-building of national professional staff on the use of:
 - Tools developed by the AGRHYMET Regional Centre for monitoring the cropping season, estimating crop yields and fodder biomass and;
 - Harmonised methods for the preliminary estimation of projected agricultural productions.
- Assist countries in setting up data collection mechanisms on food security in conflict zones;
- Accelerate the implementation of the resolutions of the Ouagadougou regional conference on the fall armyworm (FAW), including advocacy for the mobilisation of financial resources

To partners,

- Support countries in the financing of food security and early warning information systems
- Support Regional and Country Task Forces in the fight against armyworm, including the fight against grasshopper invasion in Cabo Verde.

Accra, 20th September 2019

