

MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook Update

November 2011

Deteriorating pastoral conditions aggravate food insecurity in agropastoral areas

- Preliminary estimates by the joint harvest assessment mission put annual grain production 40 percent under the five-year average.
- Pastoral conditions are also poorer than average. Seasonal migration by transhumant herds began earlier than usual, in September/October rather than in December/January as is normally the case.
- By January, the size of the food insecure population could approach or exceed figures for 2005/06 and 2006/07 and the 2005/06-2009/10 average (approximately 700,000). The highest risk groups are poor households in rainfed farming and agropastoral areas.

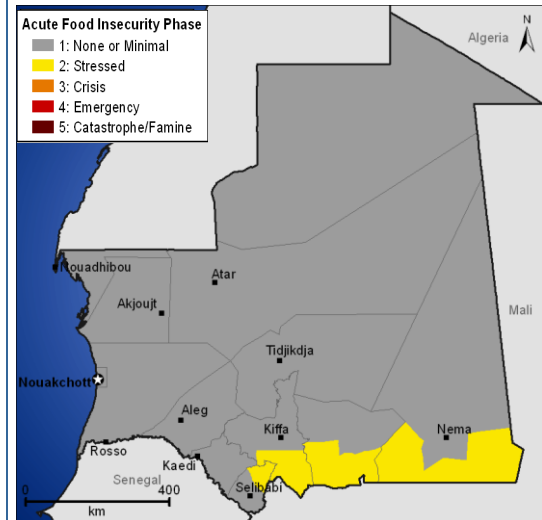
Updated food security outlook for October 2011 through March 2012

Preliminary estimates put nationwide grain production 40 percent below the five-year average and sorghum production, mainly for consumption by poor households, at around 70 percent below-average. This latter group of households, which will need to double the normal share of their spending on food, will have difficulty resorting to market purchases to cover their food gaps. This is due to rising prices of imported foodstuffs and poor households' limited access to the goods sold in government-subsidized shops opened as part of the *Opération Solidarité* program, which do not offer credit.

The government, which has recently put out an appeal for aid from its partners, has developed an assistance program based on targeted distributions of free food aid to the poor and sales of animal feed at below-market prices, with a water engineering component for pastoral areas. This program also includes provisions for the opening of more government-subsidized shops and for delaying their scheduled shutdown in December of 2012.

Rainfed farming areas (livelihood zone 6): There are still large trader stocks of all types of grains, but coarse grain supplies are extremely tight on weekly farmers markets, which are the main source of supply for poor and middle-income households. Coarse grain imports from Mali are down sharply due to a smaller volume of sales by neighboring Malian farmers trying to cope with their own poor harvests and trade diversion by Mauritanian wholesalers looking to build up large inventories in hopes of selling them to

Figure 1. Most likely food security outcomes for November-December 2011

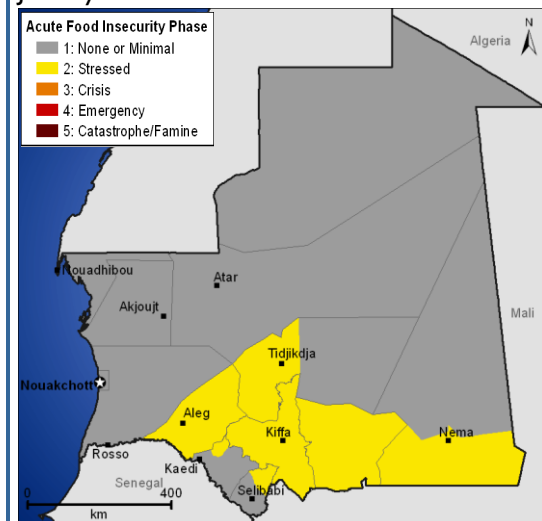


For more information on the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Reference Table, please see:

www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Most likely food security outcomes for January-March 2012



Source: FEWS NET

This report is an update of the October 2011 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook assessing food security conditions for the period from October 2011 through March 2012.

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assistance programs. As a result, current grain prices (130 to 140 MRO/kg) are already 30 to 40 percent above average (100 MRO/kg).

The slackening of the strong demand engendered by the celebration of Tabaski, with Senegalese traders offering as much as 22,000 MRO for an average sheep, has driven prices back down to their September level (of 16,000 MRO). Prices are expected to continue to fall with the arrival of transhumant herds from agropastoral areas.

Agropastoral areas (livelihood zone 5): The arrival of transhumant camel herds from the south of livelihood zone 2 (Mixed pastoral and oases) is speeding up the deterioration in pastoral conditions. The harvest outlook for flood-recession crops is not at all promising, and certain households (particularly middle-income households) have abandoned their fields to begin their seasonal migration while their livestock are still capable of traveling long distances. However, restrictions on the free movement of migrating animals by the Malians and Senegalese are slowing down transhumant herds and confining them to the edges of rainfed farming areas, where their access to water and animal feed is extremely limited.

The large supplies of small animals on livestock markets have sharply driven down their prices, while the cost of grain and imported foodstuffs is steadily rising. The projected deterioration in the food security situation of poor households from IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity) to Phase 2 (stressed) in January could occur as early as December.

Transhumant pastoral areas (livelihood zone 4): The poor pastoral conditions in these areas prompted pastoralists still in place not involved in milk marketing channels to begin their seasonal migration by as early as September/October, instead of in March/April as is normally the case. The access of poor area households to commercially marketed foodstuffs is curtailed by the erosion in their income from local employment in pastoral activities, which normally accounts for 25 percent of their income, and from labor migration and sales of gum arabic, which generate another 50 percent of their income (due to the expected 80 percent shortfall in gum Arabic production with the poor rainfall conditions in these areas). The higher selling price of the gum arabic will not suffice to offset reductions in the volume of in-kind payments for their labor. Thus, the expected steep hikes in food prices are a threat to the food security of poor households in these areas, which could find themselves in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) by as early as December.

Senegal River Valley (livelihood zone 7): Conditions are still satisfactory in the east, where rainfed grain production is down by very little (approximately 30 percent below normal), and in the west, where winter rice harvests are bolstering the food security situation in this area classified as IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity). Rice harvests in the central reaches of the Valley are augmenting the effects of cash remittances from immigrants and workers in the service sector. However, cross-border grain trade in this area is still limited and the large supply of animals from agropastoral areas has sharply reduced prices for livestock. With the large tracts of land left to lie idle, poor households were able to generate very little income from work in flood-recession (*walo*) farming operations along the Senegal River. Discouraged by the short submersion period for floodplain areas, many farmers in the center of the River Valley decided not to plant any crops. With the low level of the river (which measured three meters below the seasonal norm at the Bakel observation station), the cold and hot growing seasons for off-season crops will both be shorter than usual. This group of households is expected to stay in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) through February/March.

Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events

