

NIGER Enhanced Food Security Monitoring

February 10, 2010

Objective of this monitoring: Between December 2009 and March 2010, to more regularly monitor key features of Niger's current and near-future food security to inform decision-making related to external assistance.

Off-season and flood recession agriculture

- Dams and depressions normally used for off-season cropping were generally not well filled compared to normal, which resulted in the abandonment of several irrigation sites and below-average planting area. Water in Goroubéri (Commune 1 of Niamey), Tchia, Kagari, Boubout (Mirriah), Tam (Mainé Soroa), and Bosso (Diffa) is almost exhausted, and producers are using sumps to finish vegetative cycles. In these areas there are normally two or three harvests per year. This year, many parcels were abandoned after just one harvest due to low water levels.
- Prices for garden vegetables and tubers fell in January compared to December as the off-season harvest reached markets. Prices for tomatoes, for example, fell from FCFA 400-450 in December 2009 in Gouré to FCFA 333 in January 2010, and terms of trade for tomato to millet fell by 37 percent. Prices for peppers in Diffa improved, however, from December to January, going from FCFA 1095 to 1170. Terms of trade for peppers to millet also increased approximately 3 percent. These levels still remain below normal, however.

Pastoral conditions

- Pastures are nonexistent in the pastoral areas of Diffa, Tanout, Maîné Soroa, Dakoro, Abalak, Tchintabaraden, and N'Guigmi departments, and forage and water will not last beyond February, particularly in agropastoral Diffa, Zinder, Tahoua, and Tillabéri, and Maradi regions. Animal feed is not yet available in these areas.
- In northern pastures, the high concentration of animals has greatly reduced the available forage, and pastoralists are moving further north toward the valley of Tillia (Diffa), where the departments of Diffa, Nguigmi, Mainé Soroa, and Aderbisnat (Tchirozérine) converge. The Office of Food Production of Niger (OPVN) has pre-positioned cereal banks in seven communities in northern Diffa so that these pastoralists will not have to return to southern markets for cereals. However, these northern zones do not have any livestock markets on which pastoralists may sell livestock in order to get cash with which to purchase cereals from the cereal banks. The problem of moving livestock across 200-250 km of barren pastureland for access to markets is not yet well resolved.
- Critically low forage levels have motivated the government to begin destocking animals on state selective breeding ranches. Women's groups in agro-pastoral areas of Diffa recently received 501 milking cows (134 with calf) for distribution among members (one cow per member). FEWS NET is currently assessing the potential effects of this program on household food security. Government livestock agencies are encouraging pastoralists to manage destocking in order to avoid a complete loss of assets.

Labor

- A significant proportion of households in villages with no production left from Diffa, Tanout and Mirriah (the millet belt of Zinder region), and Gouré in October for urban centers and flood-recessional cropping areas in Niamey, Zinder, Diffa and Maradi in search of labor opportunities. Daily and monthly salaries dropped abnormally about 25 percent between September and December 2009.
- Begging, an activity normally reserved for *talibés* (boys in Koranic school), has intensified due both to food access issues and the intense competition for urban work among the rural displaced, particularly youth. Recently, people of all ages and sexes have been observed begging for food and money.

Food Prices and Terms of Trade

- Cereal prices increased between December and January. One possible driver for the increase could be the Nigerien government's offer to purchase cereals from producers at above-market prices (offer of FCFA 20,000 per 100 kg sack). The rate of purchase is about 2,000 tons per week, and approximately 3,000 of the 20,000 tons concerned in this initiative have been purchased.
- As expected, the prices of most animals fell in January, as did livestock to cereal terms of trade. The terms of trade for male goat to millet fell 23 percent in N'guigmi, 30 percent in Gouré, 20 percent in Mayahi, and 20 percent in Dakoro between December and January. However, terms of trade increased 19 percent in Maïné Soroa (29 percent above January 2009 levels), which is believed to be due to the subsidized sales of cereals there.

Regional food availability, import expectations

- Currently, price differentials favor importation, and the Niger markets are well supplied with imports (as opposed to domestic production in December in a normal year). No abnormal official or unofficial government action impedes the flow of grain between the countries.
- Nigerien traders from Agadez, Tahoua, Maradi, and Zinder have been observed exporting maize on Beninese markets, where prices are very low due to above-average production in 2009/10.

Health and Nutrition

- Nationally, admissions of malnourished children to feeding centers were 60 percent greater in January 2010 than at the same time last year. The number of children admitted to nutrition centers was relatively stable, however, between December and January. However, in Tanout department, where admissions doubled between November and December 2009, admissions continued to increase by 30 percent between December and January. Other departments showing significant increases in admissions include Guidan Roundji, Madarounfa, Aigué, and Gouré. Admissions in Mayahi, which had also doubled between November and December, fell 29 percent in January.
- Health conditions, on the other hand, are significantly better than they were a year ago with one tenth the reported cases of measles and one fourth the reported cases of meningitis. There was a slight increase in the number of reported cases of malaria. An increase in the incidence of these diseases is expected in the coming months in keeping with normal seasonal trends.
- Again, the decrease in reported illnesses and the increase in admissions of malnourished children, particularly in zones highly affected by agricultural and pasture deficits, corroborate the conclusion that food insecurity is the primary driver of deteriorating nutritional status.

Interventions

- The government's subsidized cereal sales initiative began in February (as opposed to June in a normal year) in Ouallam and Tanout.

Most likely scenario through September 2010

- Given the cereal deficits and institutional purchases (leading to lower market supplies and higher prices), cereal reserves in agro-pastoral and pastoral households will be depleted as of February.
- Food availability and income from cash crops will decline in April as the off-season concludes. Food availability on the market will be good thanks to steady imports from other countries in the region. Supply during May-June, particularly in isolated areas is likely to be spotty due to traders' speculation.
- The second (off-season) irrigated rice harvest will take place in June, thus improving income along the Niger River. Producers will trade the majority of their harvest for millet or maize.
- The nutritional status of the population is expected to decline in Diffa, Maradi and Zinder, which is normal, but also in areas where nutritional status is usually more stable, such as urban and peri-urban areas. Meningitis and measles cases will peak in March, resulting in increasing household expenses on health care and, indirectly, poorer nutritional status and increased admissions of malnourished children to feeding centers.
- The deterioration of northern pastures will lead to large-scale losses of livestock in March as pastoralists attempt to move 200-250 km south in search of better pastures and livestock markets.
- Due to poor body conditions and high costs for fattening animals, demand for livestock is expected to fall. The supply of livestock on markets is expected to increase due to the high cost of maintaining animals while conditions are poor and the need to intensify destocking for revenue to purchase cereals at higher prices than normal. As of March/April,

terms of trade will be unfavorable to pastoralists (50 kg or less per male goat).

- The 2010 rainy season will start normally, but the area planted will be below normal due to the high cost of seeds and fertilizers.
- Political negotiations regarding the term limits for President Tandja will fail, and development assistance to the government of Niger, most notably from the European Union, will end.
- Based on information currently available in the field, financing for the Support Plan developed by the Food Security Early Warning System will not be sufficient to prevent high to extreme food insecurity from July-September. Pending allocations may alter this conclusion in the next few weeks.
- Elections planned both in Niger and elsewhere in the region will take place with respect for the rules of the game. No violence or significant disruption of agricultural and market activities is expected.
- Given these assumptions regarding the most-likely conditions between now and September 2010, currently high levels of food insecurity will likely become extreme between July and September among the poor agro-pastoral households. Though the return of migrant laborers in May/June may increase the number of mouths to feed, it will also bring new financial resources. Among pastoralists, current high food insecurity may become extreme in July until pastures regenerate in July/August.

Key information gaps

Malnutrition rates by department and/or livelihoods zone, mortality rates (overall, under 5, under 2), number of people in migration and income earned in the host country, number of animals in transhumance, volume flow of grain imports, forecast for the 2010 rainy season

Sources

FAO, Agricultural statistics office of the Ministry of Agricultural Development (DSA/MDA), National Health Information System (SNIS), Agricultural Market Information System (SIMA), Livestock Market Information System (SIMB), Food Crisis Cell, Save the Children, International Relief and Development (IRD), Pastoral Development Office, FEWS NET rapid field assessments, Chamber of commerce, CAPAN, MSF Ireland, World Vision, Karkara, Helen Keller International, Phytosanitary control post, Early Warning System (SAP) and Rapid survey of vulnerability to food insecurity, National Statistics Institute (INS), Action Against Hunger Spain (ACH).