

SPECIAL ALERT

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REGION: SAHEL

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THE FOOD SITUATION IS OF GRAVE CONCERN IN PARTS OF THE SAHEL, NOTABLY IN NIGER

In 2009, agricultural production has been seriously affected in parts of the Sahel following late onset of rains, prolonged dry spells and significant pest infestations. The eastern and central parts of the Subregion were most affected with cereal outputs estimated to have declined by 30 percent in **Niger**, 17 percent in **Burkina Faso** and 11 percent in **Chad**, compared to 2008. Although favourable growing conditions boosted cereal output in most of the western part, irregular rains led to a 24 percent drop in cereal production in **Mauritania**.

In addition to the decline in cereal production, pastures were seriously affected in the pastoral and agro-pastoral zones of Sahel. For instance, biomass production in pastoral areas of **Niger** in 2009 was estimated to be 62 percent below domestic requirements. This deficit is three times as severe as in the previous year. In **Chad**, a death rate of about 31 percent for cattle was reported in west-central areas, while in **Mali**, significant livestock deaths were reported in Timbuktu, Gao, Ségou and Kidal regions.

The drop in cereal and pastures production occurred in these countries against a backdrop of high food prices. Cereal prices have remained well above the pre-food price crisis levels two years ago, notably in the eastern and central Sahel countries. Although coarse grain prices declined from their peak of August-September 2008, millet prices in April 2010 in markets of **Burkina Faso** (Ouagadougou), **Mali** (Bamako) and **Niger** (Niamey) were still 28 percent, 27 percent and 12 percent higher respectively than in the corresponding period of 2008. Although, coarse grains prices are lower in the coastal countries along the Gulf of Guinea, reflecting abundant supplies in this part of the subregion, the recent strengthening of the Naira (Nigeria currency) against the CFA Franc as well as increased fuel prices in some countries are expected to lead to further surge in food prices in the short term. By contrast, livestock prices have declined significantly leading to significant deterioration of the terms-of-trade for pastoralists.

The combination of a fall in cereal production, poor rangeland conditions, and the continuing combination of poverty and persistent high food prices, has led to high food insecurity and increased malnutrition in affected countries. In **Niger**, the Government appealed for emergency assistance in early March to avert a food crisis that threatens large segments of the population. An estimated 2.7 million people located mostly in Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua regions need food assistance this year, while an additional 5.1 million are considered at risk of food insecurity. In **Chad**, approximately 2 million people are estimated to have been affected by the poor performance of cereal crops and pasture and need food assistance during 2010. In **Mali**, an estimated 629 000 people face food insecurity in western, northern and north-eastern parts. Most at risk in Mali are 258 000 people across 23 communes in Kayes in the west, Timbuktu in the central-north, and Gao and Kidal in the north and northeast. In **Burkina Faso**, thousands of people need assistance in the Sahel, centre-north, east and centre-east regions where pasture conditions were seriously affected. About 370 000 people require assistance in **Mauritania**.



In **Niger**, the most affected country, emergency interventions have started including cereal sale at subsidized prices by the Government, comprehensive feeding by UNICEF and WFP as well as distribution of animal feed, seeds and fertilisers by FAO. Input distribution to pastoralists is also underway in **Burkina Faso, Chad** and **Mali**. However, pledges are short of requirements with UN operations only 30 percent funded as of early April. More funds are urgently needed to respond to the critical food, agricultural and pastoral situation. Moreover, seasonably dry conditions prevail in the Sahelian zone where planting is scheduled for June. If rains do not begin on time, pastoral households will require additional emergency assistance to avoid increased livestock mortality.

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