

SPECIAL REPORT

FAO CROP AND FOOD SUPPLY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO BURKINA FASO

10 January 2005

Highlights

- Starting on 9 August, an invasion of adult locusts hit northern Burkina Faso, in particular the three provinces of the Sahel region – Oudalan, Soum and Séno, devastating cereal crops.
- In addition, there was a severe drought in this same northern part of the country which also affected, although to a lesser and more variable degree, the Centre and the West. In the north of the country, seasonal rainfall fell to below 200mm in some areas.
- The combination of the locust invasion and drought has badly affected the food balance in the Sahel and North Burkina, and so a serious crisis may be expected in the next few weeks. The millet harvest is almost zero in the Sahel Region, with losses for sorghum from 40-70 percent, even higher in some areas. As regards pastures, three-quarters have been lost.
- Not only has the harvest been very seriously compromised but livestock has suffered from poor grazing land. Livestock prices fell sharply as cereal prices rose rapidly.
- 2004/05 cereal production has been estimated at about 3 062 501 tonnes of millet, sorghum, maize, rice and sorghum. The forecast cereal deficit (not counting commercial imports) is about 188 000 tonnes and should be covered by commercial imports and expected food aid. The fact that the country is able to cover its food import requirements, essentially on a commercial basis, should not hide a more precarious situation developing among the populations living in areas badly affected in 2004 by drought and locust damage. .
- In addition to this, transhumance has begun early and on a massive scale. There is a risk that livestock will be moved before being vaccinated which endangers animal health and can also lead to a multiplication of the number of thefts (vaccination is in practice a deterrent to thieves because it leaves a mark on the animal). However, we may expect that this transhumance, which shows signs of being chaotic, will create numerous conflicts between breeders and rural people in the areas to which livestock are moved.
- With the support of the mission, the Burkina authorities have drawn up a set of emergency measures to address the situation. The implementation of this will probably require international aid before long.

1. OVERVIEW

The 2004 joint FAO/WFP/CILSS/FEWS-NET crop and food supply assessment mission visited Burkina Faso from 18 to 23 October 2004. It was preceded by a FAO/WFP/FEWS-NET preparatory mission, from 11 to 17 October 2004, which concentrated on the impact of the locust invasion and drought on the crop and livestock situation, mainly in the Sahel region which was badly affected by both, and also in some places in the Centre-North (Bam and Sanmatenga). For its part, the FAO-CILSS mission visited various regions for an overview of the farming situation and also to complete the work of previous visits in the northern part of the country. The mission therefore visited the North (provinces of Yatenga, Zandoma, and Passoré), the East (province of Gourma), the Centre-South (provinces of Zoundwéogo and Bazèga), and the Centre-West (provinces of Boulkiemdé and Ziro).

The mission's objectives were: to make a preliminary assessment of 2004 cereal production and locust damage and its impact on the food security of the country; to make some recommendations to limit the effects of an imminent food crisis; and to propose emergency actions to restore agricultural and livestock production capacities.



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The mission had meetings with the supervisory authorities of the competent institutions, namely His Excellency the Minister of Animal Resources deputizing for the Minister of State for Agriculture, Water, and Fish Resources, the Secretary General of the Ministry, and the Executive Secretary of CILSS. The mission worked in collaboration with the various national services involved in monitoring the growing season, in particular on the occasion of a «Workshop to validate the forecast results of the growing season», which closed the works. It also met national bodies and cooperation agencies involved in the monitoring of food security. The mission presented its main conclusions at a return meeting with His Excellency the Minister of Animal Resources deputizing for the Minister of State for Agriculture, Water, and Fish Resources.

The mission reported that the locust invasions have been vigorously countered. The use of treatments managed, to a certain extent, to contain the development of the larvae produced by the adults – which began to hatch on 22 August – until 17 September. On that date, new swarms from Mali invaded the same regions. The severity of this new attack (one of the swarms described measured 2 km by 8) meant stronger counter measures were necessary but these had to be used with care given the fact that swarms of mature adults, differently from larvae, can move on rapidly and in an unpredictable way.

Rainfall levels have been very low in the north of the country. The rainy season began late, precipitation was irregular causing numerous pockets of drought, and there was a big fall in the number of rainy days and in the length of the growing season. Nevertheless, the country has had rainfall comparable to the norm except in the three Sahelian provinces and, in the West, in the provinces of Kossi and Banwa. However, generally speaking, the time distribution of the rains has often been unfavourable for good yields.

Farmers and breeders, who comprise almost the entire agricultural population in the zones affected, are no longer able to buy the quantities of cereals they require because the price of livestock has plummeted and that of cereals has risen sharply. In addition to these serious problems, many fear a fall in social status as they become mere herdsmen instead of being livestock owners and breeders. Given the importance of social status in local culture, attention should be paid to this aspect. In these different ways the nutritional, economic and social balance of this part of the country has been upset.

This situation has led to strong out-migration, usually on the part of young people, really children, in greater numbers than for normal seasonal migration. The most usual destinations are the nearby goldwashing zones or Côte d'Ivoire, despite the political situation in that country.

Overall, the expected supply of cereals is in excess of the country's needs, but the food situation must be examined with care, region by region and taking into account the food vulnerability factors which characterize the country. In fact, the food situation could seriously worsen in the Sahel region over the next two months. In the North and the Centre-North, the household food situation will most likely suffer within the next four months.

This state of affairs has led the Burkina authorities to draw up an emergency action plan. FAO has given its support in formulating the plan through the work of a dedicated consultant. The measures envisaged deal particularly with: supplying cereals to the populations in difficulties; the best possible use of water resources in order to complete the plant cycle and procure the water necessary for the animals and for human consumption; creating the conditions to start up production next season, in particular as regards seeds; the supply of animal fodder where it is needed, mainly by authorizing the cutting of grasses in listed forests; and strengthening the watch committees in pastoral zones to prevent bush fires which could further damage the state of the pastures.

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