



The 2012 Food, Pastoralist and Nutrition Crisis in the Sahel

Countries in the Sahel are undergoing food crises of increasing magnitude, which are occurring more frequently. The current crisis is said to be affecting 15 million people, and could be worsened considerably by the national and regional consequences of the political crisis in Mali. More than one million children are suffering from severe malnutrition. With the exception of pastoralist areas which are heavily hit by the drought, agricultural production is reaching average levels recent years. This year shows that, even in an average situation, the Sahel is in a structural food crisis, and that public policies are not capable of handling it without regular recourse to international aid. It also shows that the crisis has been caused by the ongoing degradation of livelihood systems, further undermined by difficulties in reaching vulnerable populations in time before they fall back on survival strategies that compromise their ability to withstand shocks.

1. 13 to 15 Million People in the Sahel Facing Food Crisis

The food situation in the Sahel has become instable. Starting in the last quarter of 2011, early warning systems (EWSs) predicted a serious food and nutrition crisis due to a combination of factors: a mediocre year for farmers and livestock keepers, price tensions, migrants returning from Libya, etc. [R1] The situation worsened in the first quarter of 2012 with the rise of the Tuareg rebellion (by the MNLA) in northern Mali, and took another turn for the worse with the military coup and the declaration of the Azawad independence by the MNLA. Terrorist movements contest the MNLA's authority and are deteriorating insecurity in the zone where already groups were involved in drug and arms smuggling. The return to constitutional order did not resolve the humanitarian crisis. The population of Azawad—approximately 1.3 million people—is still very exposed. [R2] As for the “eastern area” of the Sahel region, Nigeria is also facing security problems (by the Boko Haram terrorist movement) that are closing borders and upsetting (food) markets in the areas along the Niger border.

The information available on vulnerable populations relies on EWS evaluations and occasional surveys conducted between December 2011 and February 2012. It does not take into account the impacts of the political crisis in Mali. This crisis alone has already resulted in the displacement of roughly 235,000 people, half internally in Mali and half towards neighbouring countries (Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Algeria). The table below presents the food and nutrition situation in the various countries. It is estimated that more than 13 million people are vulnerable in the Sahel, of whom more than six million are facing a severe crisis. Malnutrition rates rise considerably during these crises, but remain high during periods of normal food supply for households. The prevalence of overall acute malnutrition among children below the age of 5 varies from 9.7% in the states in northern Nigeria, to more than 15% in Chad. More than one million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. [R3] [R4]

Table 1: Vulnerable Populations and Malnutrition (x1,000 people)

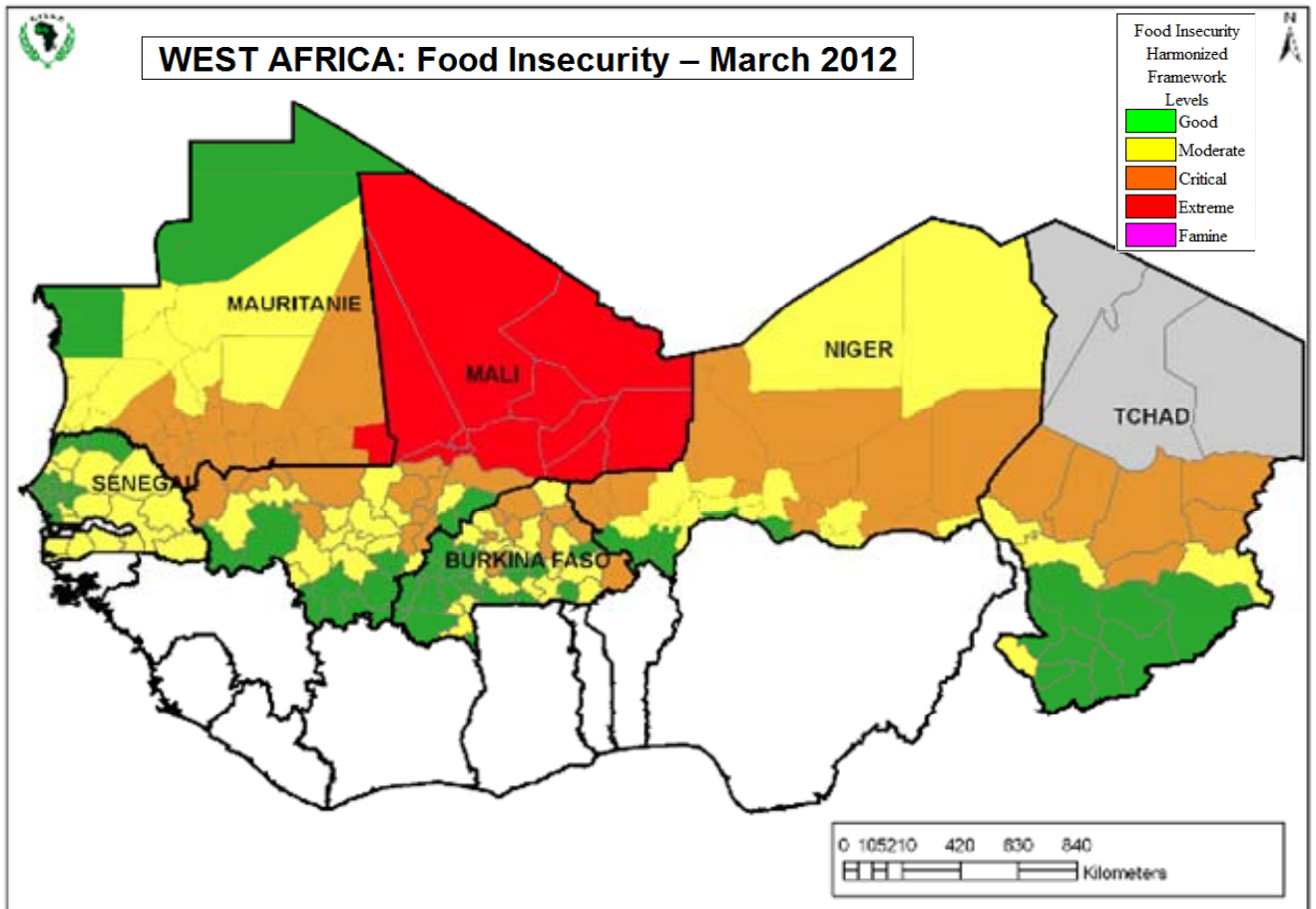
	Burkina Faso	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	North Nigeria	Senegal	Chad	TOTAL
Vulnerable Populations	1,670	3,000	700	5,458	n/c	850	1,600	13,278
Severe Acute Malnutrition – children < 5 years	99-125	175-219	12-16	310-413	207-260	20-21	127-159	952-1,213
Moderate Acute Malnutrition – children < 5 years	101	175	40	725	559	68	300	1,968
Moderate Acute Malnutrition – pregnant and breastfeeding women	59	37	14	177	126	9	70	492

Source: Inter-Agency Standing Committee – Dakar. Response Plan for a Food Security and Nutrition Crisis in the Sahel – Version 2 (February 9, 2012).

Since these data were published, they have been revised for Mali (3.6 million people), Burkina Faso (2.85 million) and Niger (6 million). Gambia is said to have 600,000 vulnerable people

(source: OCHA). The following map indicates the zones hardest hit by the crisis.

Map:1 Main Zones of Food Insecurity in March 2012



Source: Harmonised Vulnerability Analysis Framework Monitoring Group.

2. What Caused this New Crisis?

The Sahel is facing a structural food crisis that affects every year hundreds of thousands of fragile households living in poverty. Because of low purchasing power, limited production capacity (lack of land and non-land assets, and/or of employment and market opportunities) and of weakened family and community solidarity mechanisms, these households have an almost constant problem of accessing food, irrespective of overall food availability. The succession of crises affects the resilience capacity of these households, which adapt to it by sales ('de-capitalisation') of productive assets (land, equipment, livestock) and household assets (bicycles, motorbikes, jewellery, etc.). They are unable to rebuild their capacities and assets (resilience) before the next shock. [R5] They are very dependent on unsteady labour and food markets, and tensions in both of these undermine their living standards.

In West Africa, the assessment of food crises is rooted in the famines caused by the major droughts (of 1973 and 1984). These droughts oriented the information systems and analytic frameworks for food security. The first indicator of crisis remains grain production. Besides food production other factors (price, sources of income, fodder production, etc.) are considered to

assess household vulnerability. Because of this bias, two dimensions are neglected: (i) food insecurity in urban areas where poor households are very sensitive to price fluctuations; and (ii) food insecurity in the coastal countries along the Gulf of Guinea where weather hazards are not the main factor for crises. The structural and deep-reaching transformations of economies and societies are only slightly taken into account in recent analyses of food and nutrition security: strong urbanisation, growing pressure and competition on natural resources, climate change, unsteady labour markets, temporary and permanent migrations, etc.

This year, this chronic food insecurity has been intensified by: (i) mediocre grain production levels; (ii) major shortfalls in pasture production and difficulties in supplying cattle with water (crisis in pastoralist's areas), (iii) the massive return of migrants from Libya and Ivory Coast to their regions of origin, reducing the revenues obtained from migration while costs for households have risen; (iv) high food prices; and (v) (political) insecurity. Most of these factors interact closely with each other that it would be pointless to try to establish each factor's specific contribution.

Box 5 1: The Weight of Revenues from Migration in the Livelihoods of Households in Niger

Nearly 500,000 Nigeriens lived outside of Niger prior to the political crises in Libya and Ivory Coast. In 2008, the World Bank estimated the amount of migrants' remittances via the formal circuit at 39 billion CFA francs (60 million Euro), or nearly 2% of GDP. Migration concerns 82% of households in the departments of Loga, Tahoua, Tanout and Gouré. The remittances received by each household range between 200,000 (€ 305) to 4 million CFA francs (€ 6,100) per year. 45% to 87% of these revenues are used for food purchase. The drop in remittances due to the war in Libya ranges from 51% to 75% depending on the zone surveyed. (Source: FEWS NET Study; Rapport spécial. La migration au Niger; July 2011)

These factors illustrate how food economies in the region have evolved. We cannot speak anymore of cyclical or temporary situations because the above mentioned trends have become

A. Average Regional Production

The 2011 rainy season was very diverse. It affected pasture availabilities, water levels, crop growth and yields. Fodder production has considerably gone down in pastoralist areas (a 50% shortfall estimated in Niger). Grain production in Sahel countries (within the CILSS Sahel zone) dropped considerably (-26%) compared to the previous year (a good year) but stayed roughly on par with the average over the past five years (-3%). However, with the strong population growth, this figure equals food availability per person of minus 10%. The situation is diverse, however, because Mali's grain balance foresees a net surplus of 1.7 million tons (in contradiction with the price tension we have been seeing for many months). Burkina Faso also

intrinsic parameters of the structural instability that households are facing.

foresees a surplus (112,000 tons). Chad, Niger and Mauritania, however, have major shortfalls. [R6]

For the whole of West Africa, production is estimated to be up to 5% compared to the average over the past five years, which corresponds nevertheless to a reduction of food availability per person between 2% and 4%.

In a region of high cyclical and geographic production variability, the annual results of grain and other food products lie mostly within average parameters. This should be seen as a basic principle when it comes to managing food security.

Box 2: Pastoralist and Political Crises Come Together in a Major Humanitarian Crisis

The pastoralist areas in Sahel countries are facing the effects of the drought on pasture resources and insecurity simultaneously. The fodder shortage in Niger is on the order of 50% (more than 10 million tons of dry matter, for the needs of 6 million Tropical Livestock Units (TLU)) and the shortfall in Mauritania is 60%-70%. In Mali, the fodder deficit has a simultaneous effect on pastoralist areas and the "inner Niger delta" where animals are concentrated after the harvests. The shortfall also concerns the Burkina Sahel. Weather conditions have had a simultaneous effect on pastures and replenishment of water points (ponds, wells) on which livestock depends for drinking. These conditions have forced livestock keepers to begin their transhumance very early. The situation is particularly critical in Mali because of the worsening safety situation that is affecting pastoralist areas in the first place. This is inciting pastoralists to head massively to the south and to neighbouring countries. As the rainy season and sowing period has begun, the risk of conflicts between livestock keeping communities and sedentary farmers has risen considerably. One must add the growing reticence in general among local authorities and national governments (the latter in coastal countries) to host transhumant herders.

B. Very High Prices and Markets that Struggle to Adjust Supply and Demand

Markets are simultaneously one of the potential factors in crisis (e.g. affordability due to price levels, physical accessibility in isolated zones) as well as a main stimulus for food security. This year, the production surpluses in coastal countries (more than 2 million tons excluding Nigeria) and imports from the world market are capable of supplying markets in zones that have shortfalls. [R7, R8, R9]

Food markets play a growing role in food security. The proportion of self-sufficiency production is reducing by: (i) growing urbanisation; (ii) 'commoditisation' of rural economies; and (iii) growing financial needs among rural households (consumption goods, education, health care, taxes) that accentuate "over marketing" among vulnerable households and that increase their dependency on the market.

Another major characteristic is the strong "regionalisation" of markets and resource management due to: (i) the emergence of production basins of "cash grains" (notably maize in sub-humid cotton-cereal belts); (ii) increasing structuring and networking of trade actors on a regional scale; (iii) the development of communication infrastructures and financial services (transaction payments); (iv) farmers' warehousing and collective marketing

strategies; (v) changing patterns in natural resource management and marketing of livestock (emergence of sub-sector in the sub-humid areas, while keeping links with the dry, pastoralist's production areas); and (v) States' and regional institutions' efforts—with mixed results—to move toward a single, unhindered intra-regional market and to region-based governance of common river basins (e.g. Niger, Senegal, Volta).

Yet, price analysis shows that local markets also are governed by local parameters (e.g. availability, enclosure). These price disparities stimulate trade within the region. In the Sahel, prices have been evolving in an atypical way since the 2011 harvests: (i) a price spike in the harvest/post-harvest phase; and (ii) slight reversal followed by price stabilisation during the January-February period prior to a new increase.

Compared to the average over the past five years (marked by high prices due to the side effects of the 2005 food crisis in West Africa and the world price rises in 2008), consumer prices have behaved as follows:

- In the "Western" trade basin (Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia and Guinea), prices in December 2011 went up to 25% to 33%. Confronted with structural shortages, the markets in

Senegal and Mauritania are closely tied to the world markets for rice and wheat, which are the main adjustment factor for domestic market prices. The relative stability of international grain prices made it possible to limit domestic price increases despite considerable drops in production.

- In the "Central" trade basin (Burkina Faso, Mali, Togo, Ivory Coast, Ghana), prices have risen considerably, up to 50% to 60%. Price levels seem to contradict the production levels foreseen in the coastal countries and in Mali. Uncertainty about the real production levels, in combination with strong demand from the livestock feed industry in Ghana and with purchase and storage strategies of traders' and States, can explain these upward trends, which already started before the Malian crisis.
- In the "Eastern" basin (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Benin), prices have risen up to 30% to 40%. The political situation in Nigeria seems to have initially slowed down grain exports to Niger and Chad. The grain stocks in northern Nigeria offer considerable potential for regional trade, but the current security situation in North Nigeria and the naira/CFA franc

C. An Affordability Crisis for Poor Households

This is the main explanation for the crisis. In the Sahel households have faced a series of crises: 2005, marked by poor production, supply difficulties in regional markets, and very high prices; 2008, the year of the world food crisis of high prices and supply difficulties on world markets; 2010, which was a major crisis in most pastoralist areas.

Poor and very poor households, constantly facing a precarious food situation, are firstly hit when conditions deviate from normal: production decrease, price hikes, political crises, etc. They fail to anticipate these various crises. National and international response systems have difficulties in delivering appropriate assistance (in time and targeted to the right people). These households have to develop adaptation mechanisms to respond to the situation: permanent or temporary migration, abandoning their own fields and herds to work as day labourers elsewhere, sale of assets, usurious debts, reducing diets (smaller meals and less food diversity), withdrawing children from school, etc. Some of these adaptation mechanisms have little effect on the future of their livelihoods: migration during the dry season is an example of it. But when adaptation encroaches on survival mechanisms (through rising debts, loss of land or users' rights, etc.), household vulnerability increases and they lose the ability to withstand even the most minimal shocks.

D. A Somewhat Favourable International Context

The international market situation is more favourable. While wheat prices have risen slightly over the past few months, rice prices have been moving downwards or remained stable. Nevertheless, the price of rice rose 19% in 2011 compared to 2010 levels. The export price of Thai A1 super rice is around \$518 per ton. While this is still far from the highest price reached in 2008 (\$850), it is close to the 2008 average (\$541). Rice prices on West African consumer markets are close to the peaks

exchange rate will determine how traders' networks will supply Sahel markets.

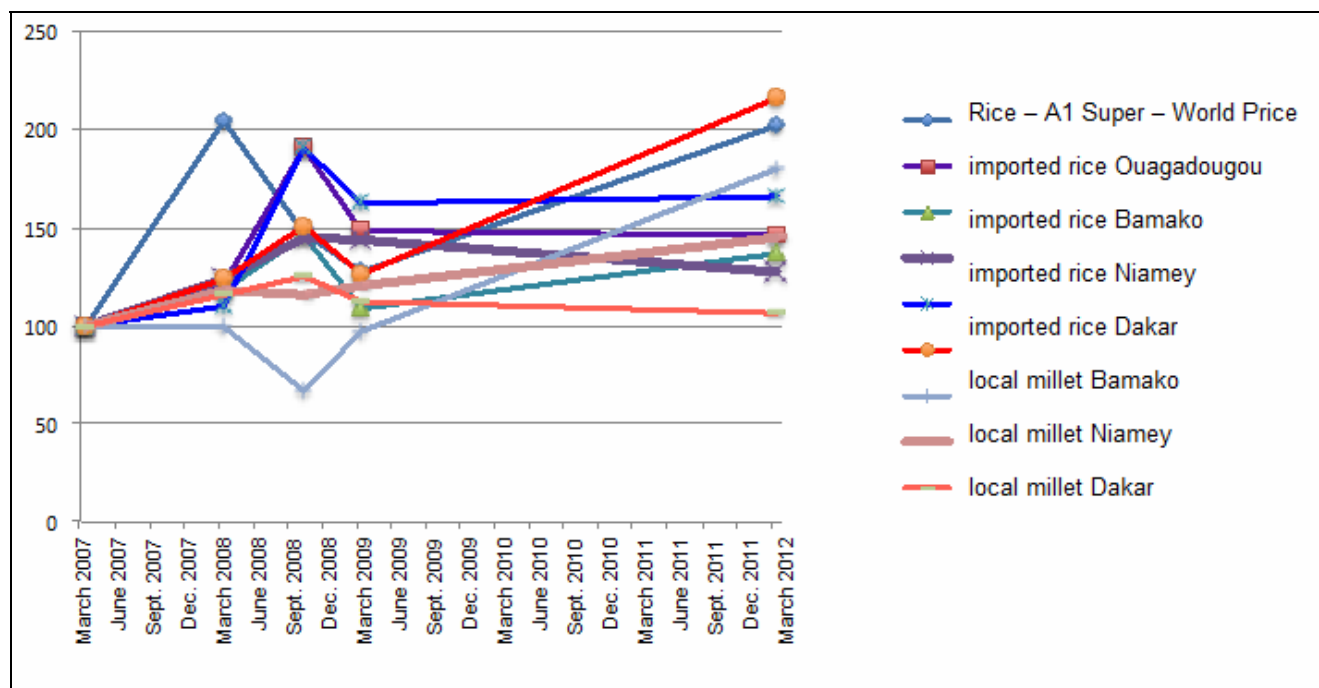
Market prospects in the past months have been disturbed by the changes in the security situation in the region, putting into question the prognostics (FEWS NET, WFP, CILSS) of steady increase of 3%-4% per month until harvest time. Several factors could make food inaccessible for people who are normally not identified as vulnerable: (i) the anticipation of a food crisis, which favours speculative practices (by traders, businessmen, civil servants/ employees); (ii) the inaccessibility of certain areas, (iii) export bans, whether formal or informal, fuelled by fears of upcoming shortages; (iii) the multiplication of security controls as a result of the fight against traffic and rebel or terrorist movements; (iv) public food purchase operations by States or humanitarian aid agencies, to complete emergency stocks for the pre-harvest period; (v) the lack of public stocks and food buffers which are used to influence market prices; and (vi) the changes in the exchange rate between the CFA franc and the currencies of Nigeria, Ghana and Mauritania.

The frequency of shocks prevents households from re-building their assets before the next crisis 'hits'. They find themselves stuck in a vicious cycle from which it is very difficult to escape. For this type of household, migration is one of the main and most effective risk minimisation strategies (see Box No. 1). For Sahel people Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Libya are the main labour markets, from where remittances are sent either through the formal banking circuit or through informal circuits. However, the labour market in Ivory Coast has been disrupted since the early 2000s. The labour market in Nigeria is affected by religious tensions and insecurity, especially in the northern states of the country along the Sahel border. Finally, the crisis in Libya has been accompanied by a massive return of migrants (200,000 to 300,000 across the Sahel). This means that an equal number of households have seen a main source of additional income suddenly dried up, without real income alternatives.

Certain zones are affected by specific conditions that suddenly change major income sources of households (e.g. the onion production zone in Niger, faced with a price drop caused by over-production).

reached in 2008. Since mid-2008, import oligopolies and distributors have not adjusted rice price reduction on world markets for West African consumers, while rice has become one of the main staple foods. The lack of public stocks deprives States of a means of pressure on commercial operators. Most authorities are, in this case, tempted to suspend import duties and taxes, thereby depriving public budgets of considerable revenues without any proven advantage for consumers.

Figure 1: A Few Key Prices Since 2007



Source: Author, according to OSIRIZ, MIS, Afrique Verte.

E. Major Uncertainties Due to Political Crises and Physical Insecurity

The current political crises will determine how the food situation evolves. In addition to the major crisis that broke out in Mali, several 'hotbeds' of instability threaten the Sahel population: the troubles caused by the AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and activities throughout the Sahel-Saharan area (Niger, Mali, Mauritania and even northern Burkina Faso); the new phase of uncertainty brought about in Guinea-Bissau by the coup d'état; and the inter-religious tensions and activities of the Boko Haram terrorist movement in Nigeria.

These crises disorganise local economies and productive activities, affecting households' income sources. They disrupt market operations considerably (withdrawal of traders, road blockades, theft/plunder of cargo), driving up prices and fuelling speculation. When tensions worsen, they trigger massive population displacements. In pastoralist areas, this also means that hundreds of thousands of animals must migrate sooner and/or longer. This disorganisation of livestock production affects the northern conflict zones as well as southern 'host' zones (propagation effect). Competition over natural, productive resources has increased, questioning former arrangements

between users' groups. Conflicts are on the rise in most areas.

NGOs and projects are forced to suspend their activities. From a food crisis the situation is sliding towards a humanitarian crisis. The insecurity also narrows down the range of response mechanisms. Cash transfers (e.g. cash-for-work) become extremely risky. Food distributions are a potential source of trafficking for armed groups that need resources and want to control the populations in the areas they covet.

In this year's configuration, where surpluses coexist with shortfalls, cross-border flows play a major role. But in the case of crisis, States are tempted to slow down the exit of food staples, thereby lessening markets' capacity to connect supply and demand. In situations of insecurity, border closings can occur in order to control rebel movements or the circulation of arms. ECOWAS, which had threatened the Malian junta with a total embargo, lifted its threat following the return to constitutional order. All the same, the current climate can only amplify informal barriers to trade (controls and corruption within the police and customs, etc.).

3. FOs and NGOs on the Alert

As early as November 2011, farmers' organisations (FO) expressed their concerns, foreseeing a much more alarmist situation than information systems announced. The livestock keepers' network "Bilital Maroobé", the "Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs d'Afrique de l'Ouest" (ROPPA) and the "Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane" (APESS), addressed a first call to decision makers and the international community, emphasising the crisis in pastoral areas. Farmers' organisations (FO) insisted on two aspects: (i) the need to intervene before the crises was felt; and (ii) the need to adapt responses to the specificities of livestock

keepers for whom the preservation of livelihoods is crucial at two levels: firstly they need the financial means to buy food staples through sales of livestock products, and secondly they have to preserve their economies ('resilience': keeping herds at productive levels at the long term for different markets). FOs emphasize preservation of livestock herds, through collaborative management of (cross border) transhumance, the preservation and development of range lands and water points, and the provision of supplements of animal feed. In addition, FOs insist on structural solutions that must be implemented to reduce rural households' vulnerability in general. They use the proliferation of

crises to challenge the meagre investments in agriculture and livestock and encourage the implementation of ECOWAP and national agricultural investment programs (NIAPs). [R10, R11]

Many NGOs started making their diagnoses in the last quarter of 2011, and tried to mobilise the international community, but other 'crisis hotbeds' monopolised humanitarian news (Horn of Africa). Organisations like Oxfam and 'SOS Faim' drew attention to the importance of early intervention to mitigate the crisis and its impacts. They spoke of preserving livelihoods, building communities' capacity to withstand shocks, and raised the issue of costs: preventive actions are less expensive than interventions

in the pre-harvest period (after the crisis has broken out). This 'cost' argument was taken up by certain international institutions (ECHO, UNICEF) to justify interventions to prevent malnutrition. Finally, they warned against market risks, contesting the optimism of certain information systems re. the market's ability to meet needs. In this context, they called for a regional response to the crisis, highlighting solidarity efforts between countries (notably the free circulation of goods and people), which should be completed by international support for implementation of national response plans. Several NGOs took position (ACF, Save the Children, etc.), delivering a similar analysis, and asked donors for help.

4. The Responses to the Food and Nutrition Crisis

The countries affected by the crisis set up response plans at the end of 2011 (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania), and generally undertook mitigation actions using their own resources and instruments (security stocks). Chad, Gambia and Senegal drew up plans more recently in 2012. It should be noted that most countries' response capacities had been weakened by limited re-constitution of physical and financial stocks following the 2010 crisis (especially Mali, Mauritania and Niger).

Most countries called for international aid, nationally and as part of regional schemes: the PREGEC (Food Crisis Prevention and Management Regional System) scheme run by CILSS and extended by the Food Crises Prevention Network (RPCA). RPCA

brings together West African leaders, international institutions, donors, FOs and NGOs. At the end of 2011, RPCA delivered a first diagnostic, based on harvest projections. [R6]

During a meeting in Paris on April 12 and 13, 2012, RPCA adopted the diagnosis elaborated by information systems and various regional actors, and called for an initiative by regional institutions. It underlined the crisis in Mali, calling for a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to people in northern Mali (see Box 3). Although RPCA is in principle an arena for consultation and intervention coordination, it was not possible to make a precise assessment of the various actors' commitments and the implementation of their plans.

Box 3: Excerpt from the Final Communiqué from the Food Crises Prevention Network Meeting (Paris, April 12-13, 2012)

During this difficult year, the RPCA members remind all of the participants of the necessity to respect the principles of dialogue, consultation and the importance of the West African leadership, in line with the "Charter for Food Crisis Prevention and Management" adopted in November 2011 at Conakry.

In this spirit, the members call upon ECOWAS and UEMOA to organise, as quickly as possible, a high-level meeting in order to make imperative political and financial decisions.

RPCA Members further recommend that ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS Members:

- Continue to finance and implement national emergency plans and development partners' actions in order to strengthen assistance to populations facing food insecurity. It is equally essential that national and regional actors (the Malian government, ECOWAS, development partners and humanitarian actors) open a humanitarian corridor in order to reach affected populations in Northern Mali;
- Provide support for agricultural producers for the next campaign by facilitating access to seeds and livestock reconstitution; Invest in long-term actions and strategies to develop populations' response capacities, notably through the implementation of national agricultural investment and food security plans.

This observation raises the crucial issue of leadership and coordination among national systems, regional institutions and schemes, and the international community. International organisations (OCHA, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, ECHO) favour a platform for coordination, the "Regional Food and Nutrition Security Working Group", at the initiative of the "Permanent Inter-Agency Committee" in Dakar (IASC). It was this platform that has conceived the 2012 "Response Plan for a Food Security and Nutrition Crisis in the Sahel" with contributions from certain NGOs. International organisations are rolling out the plan in national 'clusters' or sectors (food security, nutrition, logistics, health, etc.), in partnership with public institutions. They are extending these approaches to regional scale, with the idea to coordinate calls for international funds.

This raises the question of aid delivery channels, with a twofold challenge: Who is best capable of convincing financial partners? Who is best able to deliver the various forms of food aid and reassure the financial partners (speed, efficiency)?

Further on, while the most affected households (pastoralist communities and vulnerable farmers' categories) have already entered the pre-harvest period in 2012, the recommendations of both regional and international bodies remain focused on mitigation actions and do not work out various scenarios of how the crisis could develop itself. Within two weeks — with conflicts springing up already in Mali and prices starting to climb — food and nutrition prospects were seriously challenged. In this context, one can wonder what is the real risk anticipation capacity of "early warning systems", whether national, regional or international. What will be the impact of the confusion over respective roles when several institutions are simultaneously get the task to establish diagnoses, assess needs, mobilise resources, and delivering food aid?

Food security interventions in the six countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania and Senegal) are estimated at \$470 million. They cover a panoply of instruments: distribution of free food, grain sales at subsidised prices, cash- and food-for-work, food vouchers and cash transfers, aid to grain banks and to

animal feed banks, livelihood support (seeds, renovations, etc.), and so on. Interventions which target treatment of malnutrition

among young children and mothers are, for their part, estimated at \$211 million.

5. What Do these Repeated Crises Reveal?

2002, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 — five major food and nutrition crises in ten years, but in reality no droughts (thought to be the main risk factor in the region) of the scale of 1973 and 1984 have hit the Sahel! These recurrent crises raise questions on three levels: (i) Is the framework for analysing and understanding food economies and food crises still appropriate? (ii) Do the responses to these crises facilitate people's resilience and build their capacity to withstand future shocks? (iii) What food prospects do vulnerable households have and what solutions do development policies offer?

The framework to analyse populations' food vulnerability has been considerably enriched over the past 10 years. Most information systems and temporary surveys now attempt to take into account households' livelihoods by evaluating both their resources and their ability to withstand shocks. Households' surroundings — notably market environment — are much better taken into account. Yet, several weaknesses remain and influence the relevance and timeliness of the analyses. Overall grain production and monitoring of local shortages are still the first risk assessment criteria (availability). This 'tropism' ignores: (i) assessments of the food situation in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist zones in West-Africa, which are particularly vulnerable and currently undergoing major structural changes that can threaten the future of pastoralism; and (ii) socioeconomic disparities and inequalities between agricultural households (socio-economic differentiation), wherein we witness the existence of a growing proportion of these households with structural shortfalls, irrespectively of the overall results of the agricultural year, growing land tenure insecurity (accelerated by the food question at world scale and land speculation), the reduction of cultivated land per farm, and even the grabbing of farmers' land.

The 2004-2005 crisis in Niger revealed the magnitude of child malnutrition in the Sahel. Considerable resources have been funnelled to the (very expensive) treatment of malnutrition. Yet, this treatment has not reduced the incidence of chronic malnutrition, and prevalence remains dramatically high, generally above the standards set by the WHO. The large proportion of households in an almost permanent state of crisis has consumed most of the resources of "emergency" initiatives and does not

allow to tackle the multiple and complex factors of malnutrition (drinking water, fertility control, access to health, nutrition education, introduction of solid foods and weaning methods, etc.).

This question of resource allocation is not limited to malnutrition. The succession and frequency of crises force to give priority to food emergency responses in order to "save lives." At a time when resources are becoming scarcer, in national budgets and international aid equally, this priority hampers structural investments. Yet, all countries and aid actors are aware that these structural investments are key to break the cycle of crises.

Besides financial resources, this raises the question of the future of vulnerable and sometimes marginalised farming systems, although this is rarely stated openly in policy debates. Most agricultural development strategies favour zones and farms that, apparently, have strong potential for growth, promoting these as a major path to follow, and cherishing the myth that everyone can rise above poverty. The debate on socio-economic differentiation of farmers and, as a consequence, on different agricultural development paths, is hardly taken into account with the risk of neglecting the economic potential of a large category of farmers and livestock keepers. Moreover, the debate on social safety nets (food vouchers, cash transfers, etc.) falls in a void between relief and development strategies, while it is clear that repeated emergency relief cannot provide a satisfactory solution for households facing food crises.

The market question is also at the crossroads of crises and structural responses to crises. Generally speaking, aid and development actors take into account market dimensions (actors, prices, flows, transactions) to refine their analyses of food situation and -crisis. But the idea of (public) regulation of these markets which improves security for farmers, (food) processors and consumers, has not yet been widely accepted, because it goes against current doctrines on market functioning. ECOWAS would like to set up a regulation policy but is struggling to define instruments that would enable this on a regional scale. The same can be said of storage and warehousing policies that would require large investments if the region really wants to obtain an instrument worthy of this ambition.

RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES RÉFÉRENCES

Many sources provide detailed information on the diagnoses, analyses and response plans in the various countries (EWSs, MISs, etc.). The following references focus on regional and international documents.

R1 Document stratégique 2012. Préparation pour une crise alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Sahel et les pays limitrophes, IASC, Dakar, Décembre 2011, 49 pgs.

This report by the Inter-Agency group presents a diagnosis of the situation in the various countries and outlines a response strategy.

<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1297194>

R2 Situation au Mali, Bulletin spécial n°9, OCHA, April 12, 2012.

This bulletin emphasizes the crisis in Mali and the situation facing the refugees in the interior of the country and in neighbouring countries.

<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1331370>

R3 Document stratégique 2012. Plan de réponse face à la crise alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Sahel, IASC, Dakar, Décembre 2011, 34 pgs.

This report by the Inter-Agency group completes the previous report, updating the diagnostic and formulating a response strategy for the food and nutrition crisis.

<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1321825>

R4 Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Factsheet. Food crisis and malnutrition in the Sahel. June 2012, 2 pgs. and Echo Crisis Report, Sahel SITREP 5, March 2012, 11 pgs.

These two documents provide information on vulnerable populations and malnutrition in the various countries, emergency response plans, and contributions from the European Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/sahel_en.pdf

R5 Escaping the Hunger Cycle: Pathways to Resilience in the Sahel, Sahel Working Group (SWG), November 2011, 124 pgs.

This report by the British inter-agency network examines innovative responses to food crises in the Sahel and outlines pathways to improve households' resilience.

http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-escaping-hunger-cycle-sahel-food-security-260911-en_0.pdf

R6 Statements and presentations published for the annual meeting of the Food Crises Prevention Network (RPCA) Meeting, April 2012

http://www.oecd.org/document/59/0,3746,en_38233741_38247070_50162059_1_1_1_1,00.html

R7 Note conjointe sur l'évolution des marchés et la situation alimentaire au Sahel. CILSS-FAO-WFP-FEWSNET, 6 pgs.; CILSS-FEWS NET Joint Special Report, Grain Market Outlook for West Africa, March 2012, 6 pgs.; Bulletin Albichir sur les marchés céréaliers du Niger; West Africa Price Bulletin, FEWSNET.

These different publications summarize data on markets and prices, and the resulting analyses in terms of their impacts on the food situation.

Available online at www.fews.net

R8 The Coarse Grain Market in the Sahel, Implications for the Response to the 2012 Food Crisis, 6 pgs. WFP

<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1318212>

R9 Point sur la situation alimentaire, mensuel, Afrique Verte International, 8 pgs.

This monthly publication on prices and the food situation discusses market evolutions in the three landlocked Sahelian countries.

http://www.afriqueverte.org/r2_public/media/fck/File/Bulletins/PSA/132-point-situation-alimentaire-au-sahel-04-2012.pdf

R10 Sahel : Insécurité et crise pastorale – Appel à l'aide des éleveurs pasteurs! Réseau Billital Maroobé, March 2012, 2 pgs.

This communiqué focuses on the situation facing pastoralists in the Sahelian zone, and in particular the consequences of the political crisis in Mali.

http://www.maroobe.org/spip.php?page=article_simple&id_article=29

R11 Food Crisis in the Sahel: Five Steps to Break the Hunger Cycle in 2012, Oxfam-ROPPA-RBM, April 9, 2012, 6 pgs.

This paper reviews the diagnosis and proposes five paths and recommendations to avoid a humanitarian crisis.

<http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/ib-food-crisis-sahel-09042012-en.pdf>

These *Food Sovereignty Briefs* are a joint initiative by Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural and SOS Faim Belgium. They aim to provide summaries of food sovereignty-related subjects based on a selection of particularly interesting references. They are published every quarter and distributed digitally.

SOS Faim Belgium (www.sosfaim.org) supports farmers' and agricultural producers' organizations in roughly fifteen countries in Africa and Latin America. The Netherlands Development Organisation SNV supports various organisations and institutions (farmers', civil society, private sector) in 30 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural (www.inter-reseaux.org) is an association that aims to promote networked discussions, exchanges and reflection on the subject of rural development in developing countries.

This brief was written by Roger Blein (roger.blein@bureau-issala.com).

English adaptation by the Netherlands Development Organisation SNV (contact Joost Nelen: jnelen@snworld.org).

You can subscribe to these briefs on Inter-Réseaux's website: www.inter-reseaux.org

These briefs were produced thanks to the financial support of the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgium), SOS Faim Belgium and SNV. Inter-Réseaux is supported by the Agence Française de Développement.

If you would like to comment on the subject covered, give your opinion, provide additional information, or draw our attention to a document, please write to us at: inter-reseaux@inter-reseaux.org – Inter-Réseaux, April 2012.

