CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC Remote Monitoring Update August 2020

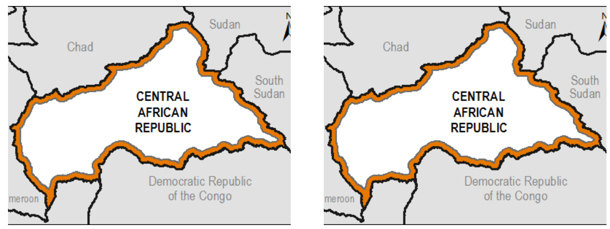
The resumption of violence from armed groups threatens agricultural production

KEY MESSAGES

- The COVID-19 pandemic has remained a concern since mid-July, given the ongoing high numbers of active cases across the country, despite there being more recoveries than new infections. The reopening of schools and resumption of community mobilization activities associated with the upcoming elections could encourage the spread of the disease in a context where recommended restrictive measures are generally not followed.

- Despite the first harvest starting, staple food prices remain atypically high, compared with the same period last year. In addition to seasonal factors, such as rising transport costs, market supply is low. Market activities are also being disrupted by violence from rebel groups in the northwest and southeast, and transhumance-related conflict. Speculative behavior from traders and some producers are also driving prices up.

Estimated food security outcomes from August to September 2020 (left) and October 2020 to January 2021 (right)



Phase 1: Minimal
Phase 2: Stressed
Phase 3+: Crisis or higher

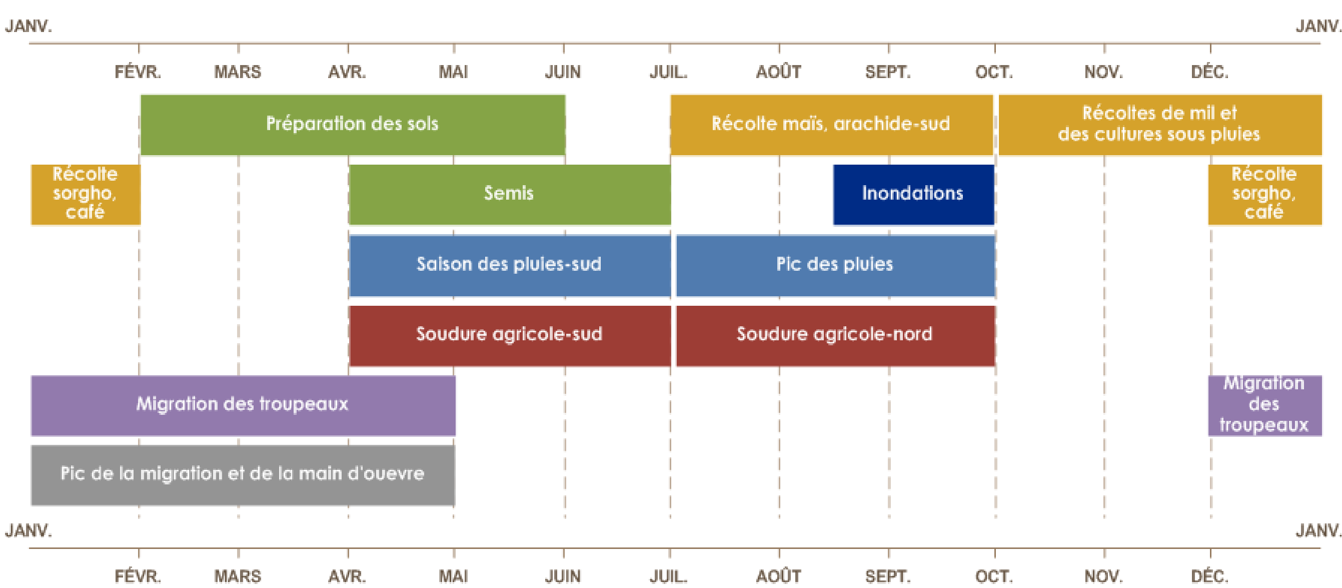
! Would likely be at least one phase worse without current or programmed humanitarian assistance

Source: *FEWS NET*

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners. FEWS NET Remote Monitoring countries use a colored outline to represent the highest IPC classification in areas of concern.

- Despite favorable rainfall throughout the country, agricultural activity has been disrupted as armed groups have resumed violent activity in the northwest and southeast, and animals owned by herders are destroying more fields. This will likely result in a severely reduced harvest. Facing high prices and limited access to own foods, poor households in these areas will be exposed to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through at least January.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

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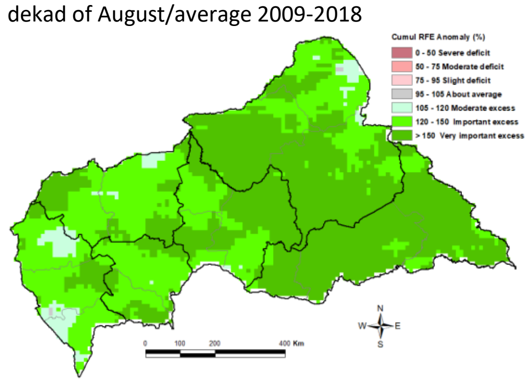
ZONE	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
National	• While the COVID-19 pandemic remains a concern in most of the country's prefectures, with 4,700 cumulative cases, including 61 deaths and 2,855 active cases as of 27 August, its progress is most worrying in Bangui, Nana-Mambéré, Ouaka, and Haute-Kotto. Nevertheless, since mid-July, new cases have been declining, and the response has improved as a result of decentralizing care, introducing community-based monitoring, and increasing daily testing. Mask wearing and social distancing have become mandatory in public places. • The resurgence of higher-than-normal levels of violence by rebel groups in the northwest and southeast of the country is negatively affecting agricultural activities, local market supplies, and the provision of assistance. In addition, animals owned by pastoralists from Sudan and Chad have been destroying fields. • Despite the first season's harvests taking place, staple food prices remain atypically high, compared with last year, due to reduced market supplies, high transport costs, and speculative practices caused by the pandemic.	• Notwithstanding mask distribution, most of the population do not take the recommended protective measures. As a result, the ongoing reopening of schools and the start of the election campaign in the next few months could increase community transmission. Moreover, despite the response being decentralized, there is still limited capacity when it comes to caring for and monitoring patients. • Acts of violence by armed groups and community tensions are likely to increase as the end-of-year presidential elections approach. Increased internal population displacement and disruption to agricultural activities and market functioning could then be expected. • Agricultural production is expected to remain broadly similar to last year but above the five-year average. However, disruption in market function, localized production slumps in conflict areas, and speculative behavior from traders could keep food prices high.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JANUARY 2021

The spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall remains satisfactory, with seasonal totals above average in all the country's prefectures. In the south and west of the country, the local supply of fresh produce (maize, groundnuts, and vegetables) from the first season is increasing in local markets. Market function remains disrupted by armed groups resuming their violent activity in the northwest and southeast, resulting in over 12,000 people being displaced and households being prevented from accessing fields far from their homes. In addition, animals owned by transhumant livestock farmers from Sudan and Chad have repeatedly been destroying fields. In the north, particularly in the prefectures of Bamingui-Bangoran and Vakaga, the increased presence of the security forces and inter-community dialogues have led to the return of 81 percent and 82 percent, respectively, of the displaced persons who were there during the first quarter of the year, according to UNOCHA. However, these returnees do not have enough seed to farm in the usual way.

Figure 1. Rainfall estimate (RFE) anomaly in the 2nd dekad of August/average 2009-2018

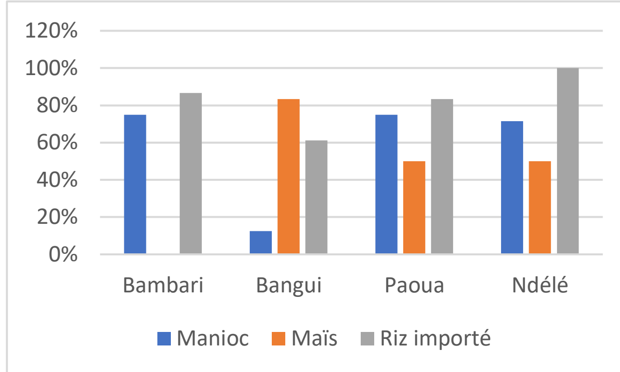


Source: *FEWS NET/United States Geological Survey (USGS)*

There will likely be localized production losses during the pre-electoral period when community tensions and violence by armed groups could increase. However, national agricultural production is expected to remain above the five-year average associated wit the favorable rainfall and the relative lull at the start of the first season, increase household access to their fields. In addition, NGOs have been supporting market-gardening and vegetable-garden production in sites with a high population of IDPs.

More goods have arrived from Cameroon due to COVID-19 response activities being decentralized in the various health regions and shorter testing times for road transport operators, who now only have their temperature checked at the border. However, the deteriorating road network extends travel times. Illegal checks and taxes are along trade routes, also increasing transport costs. As a result, domestic markets cannot be reliably replenished from the capital, and food prices are high, especially for imported goods. Moreover, agricultural households that buy other basic needs (soap, salt, refined oil, sugar, and onions) imported at high prices from Cameroon also tend to pass this increase on when they market local produce.

Figure 2. Prices of certain staple foods in August 2020 versus August 2019



Source: *FEWS NET*

Except for maize and sorghum, whose prices have remained stable, other food prices have seen slight to moderate increases of between 14 and 27 percent compared with last month. Compared with the same time last year, prices are generally higher: 32 percent for maize, 38 percent for cassava, 53 percent for sorghum, and 74 percent for imported rice.

According to OCHA, during this second half of the year, the humanitarian community plans to transfer more funds, which between January and June 2020 reached 362,000 people: an increase of 15 percent compared with the same period in 2019. Bangui Airport's gradual reopening to commercial flights and the August arrival of a helicopter for humanitarian missions are likely to improve interventions in hard-to-reach areas.

The enhanced local supply of harvested produce and products of hunting and fishing in the prefectures of the central and western areas of the country is helping to improve food access and household incomes. Self-grown produce is the primary source of household food and income and leading to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes in these areas. However, in the northern prefectures where humanitarian access remains limited, high market prices are leading poor households to increase their reliance on hunting and wild foods (caterpillars, mushrooms, wild yam, and wild potato). These households remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

The harvest will be widespread in the country from October to January and is expected to improve outcomes to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in the more stable central and western areas of the country. In the northern prefectures, the below-average harvest due to a lack of seeds during the planting time is expected to drive Stressed (IPC Phase 2) among poor host and returning households. The harvest is not likely to be sufficient in some parts of the northwestern and southeastern prefectures, with conflict limiting household access to fields. The same is true in the Haut-Mbomou prefecture, where animals owned by herders have destroyed a significant proportion of planted crops. In these areas, IDPs and poor host households will be more dependent on the market and assistance and will most likely remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through at least January 2021.

In urban centers and sites with high IDP populations, the economic slowdown will continue to affect the livelihoods of the poor negatively. Declining purchasing power and high prices for food and other basic needs are expected to drive Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING

In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. Learn more here.