FEWS NET
FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS NETWORK

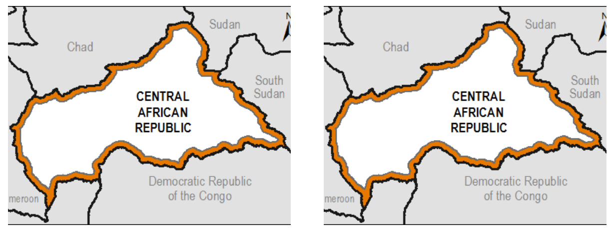
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC Remote Monitoring Update October 2020

Imported products maintain high prices on the markets

KEY MESSAGES

- Favorable rainfall and generally calmer security situation in the center, south, and southwest promote above-average agricultural production across the country. However, flooding, limited access to fields, and a reduction in cultivated land due to the late return of internally displaced persons to their communities result in lower harvests in northern, northwestern, and southeastern prefectures.
- The northwestern and southeastern prefectures will continue to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) between October and May due to limited access to fields and movement restrictions imposed by armed groups, negatively affecting livelihoods. With below-average production, poor households in the Bamingui-Bangoran and Vakaga prefectures will depend on markets early and will experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity between February and May.
- Despite a downward trend in new cases of COVID-19, a possible increase in community transmissions over the next few months can be expected due to the mobilization of the population during the election period. The pandemic will continue to slow economic activities, disrupt the country's supply of imported food products, and limit migratory flows and remittances.

Projected food security outcomes, October 2020 to January 2021 (left) and February to May 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*

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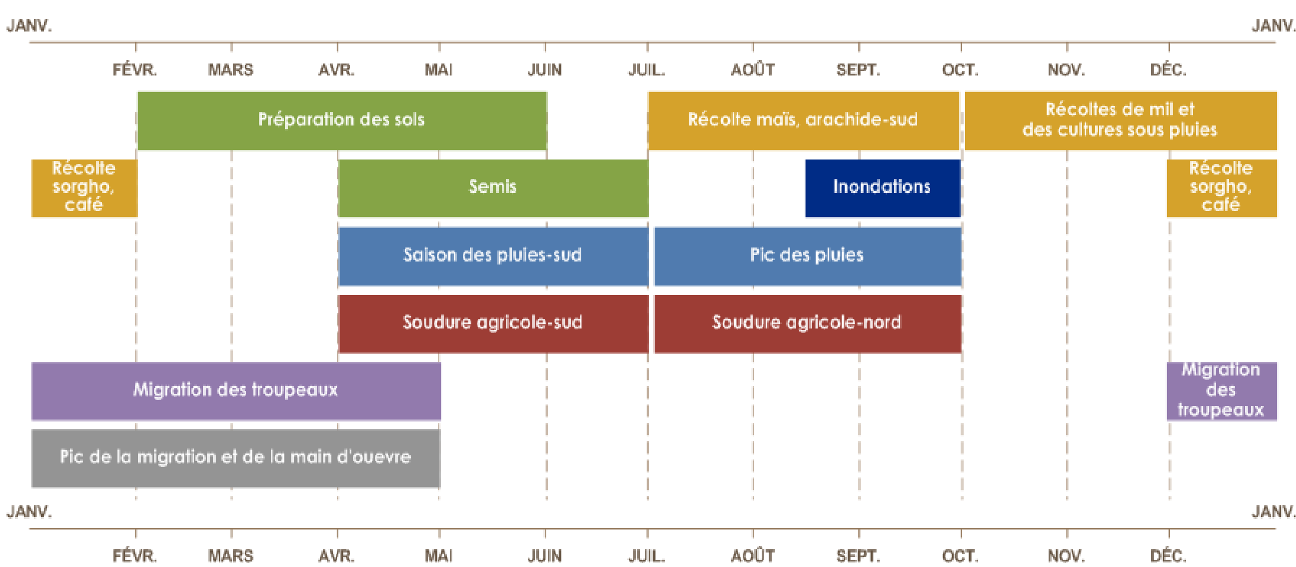
SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

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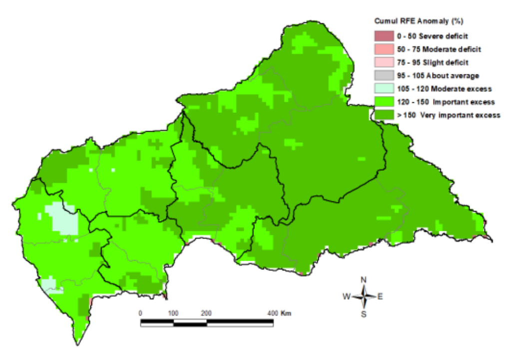
ZONE	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
National	• Since mid-July, the number of new COVID-19 cases has decreased, and the cumulative number of confirmed cases is 4,863 as of October 27. With testing limited to suspected cases and at-risk people, and most deaths occurring in community settings, the true magnitude of the pandemic is not known. Bars remain closed, and out-of-country travelers have to get tested. The pandemic continues to negatively impact economic activities, trade, and migration to Cameroon. • Although there has been an overall improvement compared to the past two years, the security situation remains precarious, particularly in the northern, northwestern, and southeastern regions. In these regions, rebel groups continue to commit atrocities against the population and humanitarian actors and set up checkpoints against transporters and traders. This prevents the normal resumption of livelihood activities. • The cumulative rainfall recorded since April is above-average to well above-average throughout the country, causing flooding in several locations. Floods have already resulted in the destruction of homes, fields, and other property in the prefectures of Vakaga, Bamingui-Bangoran, and Ouaka.	• Rallies organized around the upcoming elections are likely to cause community transmission of the virus. Therefore, it is likely that the health situation will remain worrisome and will not allow the normal resumption of economic activities in the coming months. Food product imports and migratory flows with Cameroon will experience disruptions. • Abuses by armed groups and community tensions are likely to escalate, approaching the presidential elections scheduled for the end of the year. This will likely lead to an increase in internal displacement and a disruption of agricultural activities and market operations. • Agricultural production should remain generally similar to last year and above the average of the past five years. However, dysfunctional markets, localized drops in production in conflict zones, and traders' speculative behavior could continue to keep food prices high, especially for imported goods.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2021

Since the start of the season in April, rains have been regular and intense, with above-average rainfall throughout the country as of October 20 (Figure 1). Flooding has occurred in several areas since August, particularly in the north and center. According to technical services and local authorities, these floods have destroyed about 900 ha of crops in Ndélé, 530 ha in Alindao, 1,650 ha in Birao, and over 52 ha in Bamabari. They have also affected the sub-prefecture of Bimbo. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), floods affected 15,000 people in the country during October. As the monsoon continues and water levels rise in various rivers, other areas – including the capital – could be affected.

Figure 1: Rainfall estimate (RFE) anomaly in the 2nd dekad of October/2009-2018 mean



Source: *FEWS NET/USGS*

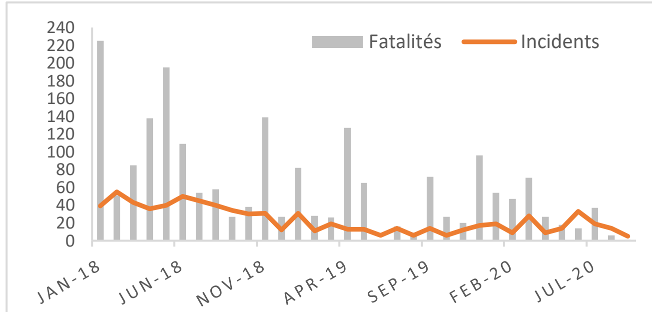
Good rainfall and increased NGO and government support for seeds in the relatively calmer areas of the center, south, and southwest should help improve agricultural production. However, in the north, the late return of displaced persons to their communities of origin and the lack of seeds have limited agricultural activities. Added to this are the adverse effects of recent floods. In the northwest and southeast, where armed groups are active, movement restrictions and population displacement could reduce agricultural production locally.

Harvests are starting fairly normally and are the main source of food for most households. They also help increase food availability in local markets. However, in areas affected by floods and violence from armed groups, food purchases in markets and products from hunting, fishing, and gathering are more important sources.

Disruption of activities at the port of Douala, disturbances along the main Bangui-Douala corridor, health checks at the borders, and deteriorating road conditions have led to increased transport costs and delays in supplying markets. Traders' stocks of imported products (rice, beans, and refined oil) are below average, and they are taking the opportunity to speculate on prices.

In the markets, the prices of local staple products, maize and cassava, show moderate declines from previous months and are stable compared to the same period last year. Sorghum prices, however, remain on the rise, averaging 52 percent higher than last year due to continued low supply on the markets and poor prospects in the northern production areas. For imported products, notably rice and beans, prices are up 44 and 20 percent respectively compared to last year.

Figure 2. Change in security incidents and fatalities from January 2018 to September 2020



Source: *FEWS NET/ACLED data*

Despite the overall above-average production outlook, household income remains below normal and continues to be negatively impacted by armed groups' looting, the economic slowdown due to COVID-19, and the lack of market areas due to market isolation. This income comes mainly from the sale of agricultural products, small-scale trade, and agricultural and non-agricultural labor. In western areas bordering Cameroon, travel restrictions due to the pandemic prevent producers from taking advantage of higher prices in the neighboring markets of Cameroon. This limits migratory flows and money transfers. In urban centers, the 26-percent decline in employment in trade and income-generating activities, according to the assessment of the Ministry of Planning, is negatively affecting household incomes and purchasing power.

Due to the generally calmer security situation, the number of IDPs, estimated at 641,292 at the end of August by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), fell slightly compared to June. IDP returns were mainly in the prefectures of Bamingui-Bangoran, Vakaga, and Ouham. On the other hand, new displacements have led to increases in the prefectures of Ouham-Pendé and Haut-Mbomou. IDPs still represent at least 20 percent of the population in the prefectures of Basse-Kotto, Haut-Kotto, Mbomou, Haut-Mbomou, and Nana-Gribizi.

With above-average production, self-production will be the main source of food for poor households in the calmer areas of the center, south, and southwest, and will promote Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity in these areas through January. However, between February and May, declining stocks and lower income from the sale of agricultural products will limit household access to food at a time when prices begin their seasonal increase. This decline in food access will cause poor households to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

Below-average harvests in the northern prefectures and the negative impacts of flooding will cause poor households in these areas to experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity through January. This situation will decline, however, with the early depletion of their stocks. Households will also face a drop in income due to relocation and construction expenses. In these areas far from food supply centers, below-average market supply, and increased household dependency will lead to atypical increases in staple food prices between February and May, and poor households will face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity.

In areas experiencing violence from armed groups in the northwest and southeast, poor households rely more on food assistance and market purchases due to reduced access to fields and movement restrictions that limit opportunities to access hunting and gathering products. In September, humanitarian actors assisted 9,050 people in the northwest. However, due to insecurity and poor road conditions, assistance is insufficient and erratic. These areas will face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity from October to May.