

MALI Food Security Alert

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Food security impacts of agro-pastoral production deficits in Gao, Mali

In pastoral areas of Timbuktu and Gao, particularly in the Gourma area, where livestock from both regions concentrate during the dry season, pastoral conditions were poor in 2008/09, resulting in below-normal animal body conditions, market value, reproduction, and milk production. The delay of the rainy season in 2009 also caused unusually high losses of livestock in August. Rains in 2009 were worse for a second consecutive season. Despite Mali's national cereal production surplus, the hunger season will start early for poor and very poor pastoral and agropastoral households in these areas, who will be highly food insecure from February/March until July/August 2010. The government's capacity to respond effectively to the situation remains unclear.

The 2009 rains stopped suddenly in September throughout Ansongo and Menaka, as well as in Tilemsi commune (Gao) and Tarkint (Bourem). As a result, pasture development was much lower than normal, even lower than last year, and the trend of below-normal animal production worsened. During a livelihoods assessment in November 2009, pastoralists asserted that their food security in 2009/10 would be the worst of the last six years, second only to last year. In pastoral areas of Menaka, Tilemsi Valley (Gao), and Tarkint (Bourem), pastoralists responded to deficits by moving their herds in November - instead of March as in normal years - to better pastures in Anchawadj, Tin Hama, Inékar, and Anderamboukane. The high concentration of animals in these areas increases the rate of pasture degradation, the risk of epidemics, and the risk of conflict over water resources and pastures. Thus, declining animal body conditions and a decline in livestock production. The poor and very poor depend on livestock production, which is their primary source of dietary diversity, typically for 10 percent of food consumption, and for 15-30 percent of their income sources. With two consecutive seasons of poor pastoral production, the poor will sell more of their animals and animal products than usual to buy grain, thereby reducing dietary diversity and the stock of productive assets and putting themselves at risk of above-normal levels of malnutrition. The pastoral hunger season will start early in February/March this year, instead of April in a normal year, and affected households will need livelihoods and nutritional support.

Moreover, agropastoral households suffered crop losses of up to 75 percent in 2009, particularly in Ansongo, the breadbasket of the region. In the transhumant herding and millet-production livelihoods zone of southern Menaka and Ansongo cercles, poor production of millet and upland rice, the staple foods in the region, directly affected middle-income and rich households. However, with less production at harvest and fewer resources to hire labor, local demand for both agricultural and non-agricultural labor fell this year. Poor and very poor households depend on local labor for 40 to 70 percent their income. As these households also spend more than half of their income on staple foods when conditions are normal, they will need assistance in this abnormally poor year to access food. Poor and very poor households need new labor opportunities (prior to land preparation, which takes place in May/June) and discounted or free cereal distribution.

A joint mission conducted by WFP will take place between February and March in the Sahelian agropastoral and pastoral north-eastern Mali and Burkina Faso. The results of this study will improve understanding of food security impacts and their likely evolution until September 2010.

Figure 1. Estimated food security conditions for March 2009

