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FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS NETWORK

MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook — January through June 2015

Early depletion of harvest stocks in the southern and central regions

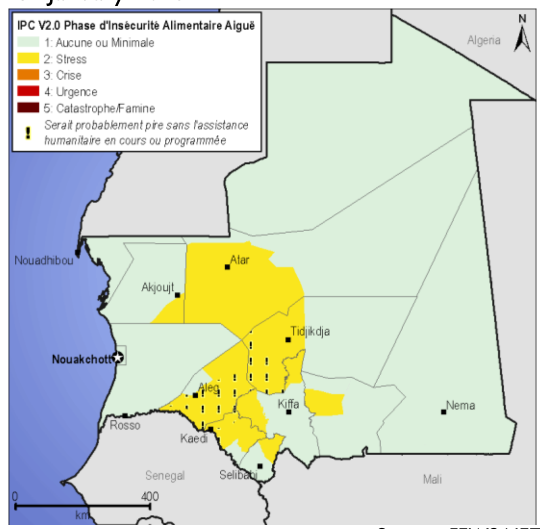
KEY MESSAGES

- The failure of flood-recession crops in the northern and western reaches of the Agropastoral Zone has further aggravated shortfalls in harvest production and associated seasonal incomes. Pastoralists have icnreased their sales of animals, with the resulting surplus triggering an atypical seasonal decline in livestock prices. Poor households will have more difficulty meeting their food needs and, thus, will be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) between February and June.

- With the limited farming activities in *walo* areas in central areas of the Senegal River Valley after the failure of rainfed crops, the lean season in farming areas will begin earlier than usual despite the small harvests of irrigated main season crops. As in the northwestern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone, households in this area will have trouble meeting their food and livelihood protection needs, which will put them in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as of March.

- Though Crisis (IPC Phase 3) conditions are expected in the south-central part of the country and even in the Oasis and Wadis Zone, other livelihood zones are currently experiencing Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity. Average seasonal incomes, the availability of rainfed and irrigated crops, and/or the improvement in pastoral conditions should allow the food security situation to remain more or less in line with seasonal norms through the end of June 2015.

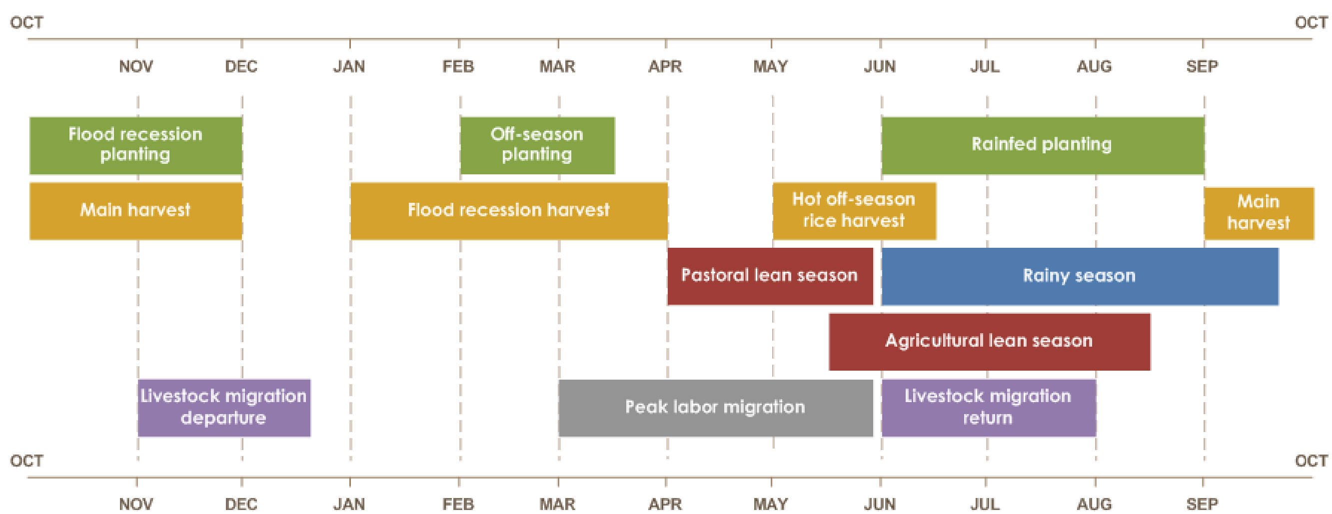
Most likely estimated food security outcomes for January 2015



Source: *FEWS NET*

This map shows current relevant acute food insecurity outcomes for emergency decision-making. It does not necessarily reflect chronic food insecurity. Learn more here.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



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NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Current situation

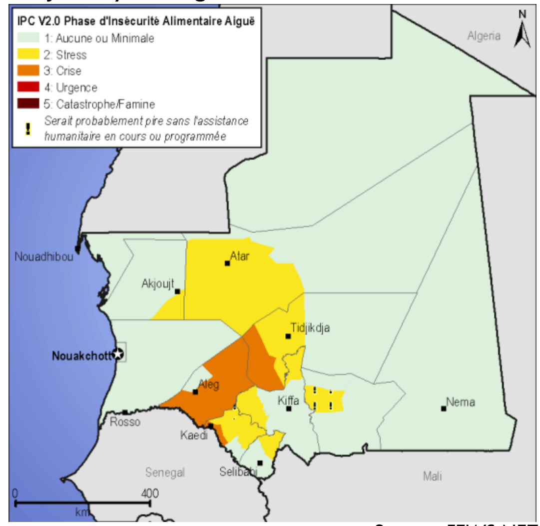
Rainfall pattern: There has been no meaningful rainfall in crop-producing and pastoral areas since the November rains reported in Adrar and Inchiri. The resulting pasture deficit has triggered premature herd movements by transhumant livestock, except in Tiris Zemmouroù where camel traders have confirmed the continued existence of near-average levels of pasture across the area extending from Bir Moghreïn (in Mauritania) to the southern reaches of the Moroccan and Algerian Sahara.

Cultivation: Late-season sorghum crops in certain parts of the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and eastern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone have begun to wither for lack of a sufficient water supply. This is attributable to the earlier than usual end of the rains and a warmer than average "cool" season and will, unquestionably, reduce yields of late-season crops and, thus, expected output from the November 2014 harvest.

Despite the more or less average water levels (between 40 and 90 percent) in lowland areas, which are especially extensive in the central and northern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and which, for the most part, were planted in crops, cereal production in these areas is expected to be down sharply due to the severe damage to these crops from premature herd movements bringing transhumant livestock herds through these areas during the tillering stage of their growing cycle. Moreover, those crops not destroyed by livestock were subject to heavy stalk borer infestations.

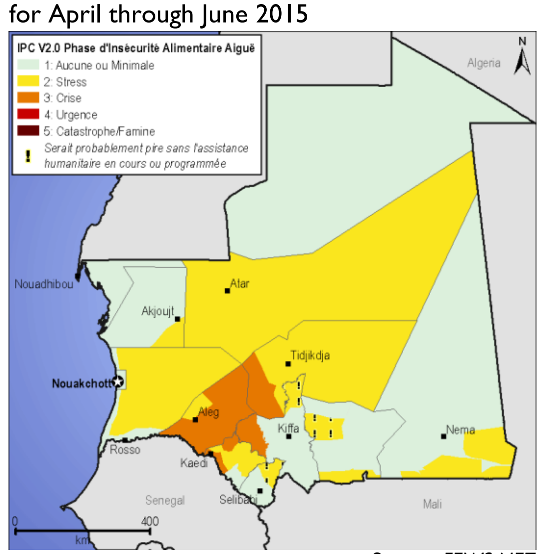
On average, the growing of *walo* crops (flood recession crops planted in floodplain areas along the Senegal River and its tributaries and in riverbank areas) normally meets half the cereal needs of poor households in the Senegal River Valley area and southwestern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone benefiting from these activities and provides three quarters of their seasonal farm income. However, this year, most of these areas were left dry by the limited rainfall activity during the 2014 growing season. Low-lying areas collecting runoff from the river and fed by some of its tributaries were planted in crops but, as in the Agropastoral Zone, most of these crops were ravaged by straying animals, transhumant herds, and stalk borers. However, many farming communities turned to growing irrigated "winter" crops (mainly maize and legumes).

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for January through March 2015



Source: *FEWS NET*

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for April through June 2015



Source: *FEWS NET*

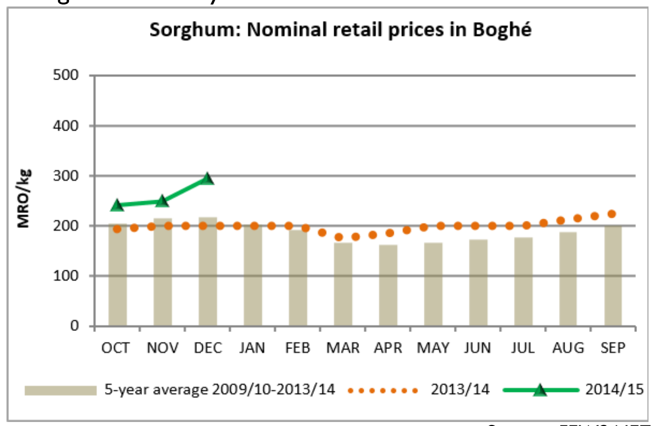
These maps show relevant acute food insecurity outcomes for emergency decision-making. They do not necessarily reflect chronic food insecurity. Learn more here.

Pastoral conditions: With the heavy pressure from transhumant Mauritanian herds and herds from northern Senegal, the already mediocre pastoral conditions in most parts of the western and northern reaches of the country since September due to the erratic light rainfall activity in these areas are much poorer than usual. Pastoral conditions in the rest of the country (from eastern Gorgol to southern Hodh Echargui) are still good, but expected overgrazing problems with the movement of transhumant pastoralists and their animals through these areas could quickly create a pasture deficit, particularly in the absence of effective measures for fighting the brush fires which have already erupted in these areas. Thus far, there are no reports of any epizootic outbreaks.

Seasonal incomes: With the good pastoral conditions and yields from rainfed and irrigated crops, at a minimum, poor households should have average seasonal incomes, except in south-central areas of the country where seasonal household incomes are well below-average due to the limited supply of work. The poor progress of flood-recession crops is limiting the use of farm labor and the earlier than usual stream of short-term seasonal labor migration will affect normal income levels from pastoral work. Despite the larger than average numbers of poor household members engaged in short-term seasonal labor migration, so far, there is no evidence that this is having any major positive effect, with these migrant workers having an extremely hard time finding jobs in the productive sectors of receiving areas (mainly Mauritanian and Senegalese cities), where the seasonal supply of farm work is limited and there is an extremely large labor pool.

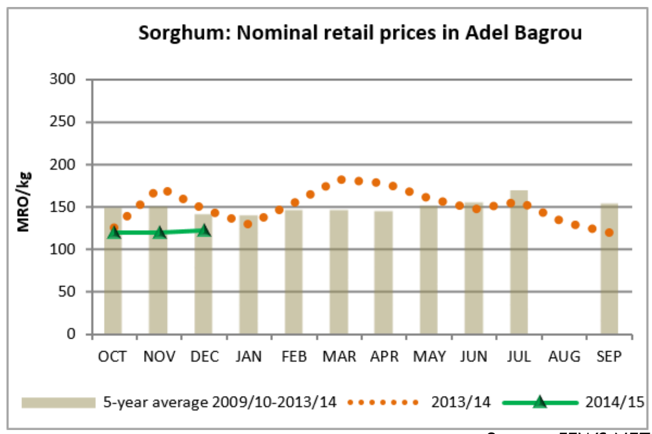
Markets and prices: Retail markets still have good supplies of imported staple foodstuffs. As for domestic cereal crops, December prices for sorghum were up on retail markets in all livelihood zones due to the large shortfall in nationwide sorghum production and limited flow of seasonal cross-border trade in sorghum from Senegal and Mali. Rises in prices between November and December range from 18 percent in the Senegal River Valley (Figure 1) down to 1.7 percent in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone (Figure 2). Prices are up from the same time last year by 47.5 percent in the Senegal River Valley, 12.5 percent in the Oasis Zone, and 27.9 percent in the Agropastoral Zone, but are down by 17.3 percent in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone. They are still moderately to well above the five-year average in all livelihood zones.

Figure 1. Trends in sorghum prices in an area of the Senegal River Valley



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 2. Trends in sorghum prices in an area of the Rainfed Cultivation Zone



Source: *FEWS NET*

Prices for wheat, the main imported substitute foodstuff, are unchanged from last month in all livelihood zones and trending downwards. This is attributable to the good availability of wheat from a large, regular flow of private commercial, government, and humanitarian imports. Though up sharply from the same time last year by 30.7 percent in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone, prices in all other livelihood zones are stable. The only major price fluctuations from the five-year average by more than +/- 10 percent are in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone (+42.4 percent) and the Agropastoral Zone (+11.9 percent).

The pasture deficits in certain parts of the country and influx of transhumant Senegalese herds have triggered an atypically large increase in seasonal sales of livestock. In general, the resulting surplus in rural areas and on urban livestock markets has driven down the prices of sheep since November in all livelihood zones with the exception of the Agropastoral Zone, where they are up by close to nine percent. Livestock prices are generally down from the same time last year, except in the Senegal River Valley, where they are up by 20.1 percent. Only in the Oasis Zone and Agropastoral Zone are they significantly above the five-year average.

Terms of trade in all livelihood zones have depreciated since November with the decline in local prices for livestock and the limited flow of cereal trade from Senegal. This has been a contributing factor in curtailing the food access of poor households, particularly in the western reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and central reaches of the Senegal River Valley.

Assumptions

The most likely nationwide food security scenario for the period from January through June 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- Annual national cereal production is expected to be down sharply from figures for 2013 and 2014 and well below-average. Rainfed crops were affected by the pattern of erratic light rainfall activity and flood-recession crops by straying animals, stalk borer infestations (in lowland and downstream areas), and the low flood stage of the river (*walo* crops in the central reaches of the river valley), particularly in south-central areas of the country.

- However, with the relatively good yields of irrigated "winter" crops throughout the river valley, households will have stocks of paddy rice through the end of February. Certain households growing cold off-season crops (maize) will have food stocks through the month of March. No large-scale hot off-season farming activities are expected with the already low water levels along the river. Market garden production will follow the same pattern as irrigated crop production, with near-average crop yields in January and little to no production between February and March.
- Pastoral conditions in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and eastern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone will meet the needs of local livestock between now and June but will cover the needs of livestock from other areas only through January/February.
- Animal birthing rates between January and March will be below-average due to the mediocre condition of pastures, except in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and eastern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone. Poor household incomes from pastoral work will be well below-average in most parts of the country throughout the outlook period with the earlier than usual migration by transhumant herds from most pastoral areas to the southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and the Rainfed Cultivation Zone.
- The flow of short-term seasonal labor migration will speed up between January and March, but is not expected to have any major positive effect due to the limited supply of work in farming areas, which normally provide employment for over 70 percent of migrant workers, as well as urban areas. There should be a larger supply of work in coastal areas of Mauritania as well as Senegal with the tough main growing season in both countries.
- There should continue to be a regular flow of adequate market supplies of imported foodstuffs (oil, sugar, rice, wheat, pasta, etc.), bolstered by re-exports of Asian rice from Senegal. There will be a larger than average volume of re-exports of imported commodities in all border areas to Mali, Senegal, and southern areas of the Maghreb.
- However, with the erratic pattern of rainfall, there will be a limited flow of domestic trade in coarse grains due to the large shortfall in crop production. Cross-border trade in coarse grains will pick up in April, in keeping with seasonal farming practices, but the volume and duration of these trade flows will be well below-average with the shortfalls in cereal production in border areas of Senegal and certain parts of Mali.
- Prices for imported foodstuffs and coarse grains will rise in line with normal seasonal trends. There will be steeper rises in prices in south-central areas of the country with the sharpest declines in local crop production. Poor sorghum availability will drive up prices and cause poor and middle-income households to fall back on substitute cereals (locally-grown rice and wheat), driving up their prices as well.
- By January, there will be a steeper than average decline in livestock prices in rural areas, where livestock herds are being culled as a protective measure against potential losses from pasture deficits and long-distance migration and where, in addition to the large-scale sales of livestock by transhumant pastoralists, most sedentary pastoralists will be steadily ramping up their sales of animals to meet their needs during the long lean season for pastoral populations. Speculation by traders using the physical condition of animals as justification for raising prices will keep livestock prices high in urban areas.
- Certain international assistance programs scheduled to shut down in December will not resume operations until March, but government programs (village-level food security stocks (SAVS), government-subsidized "*boutiques de solidarité*" (BS), outpatient therapeutic feeding centers (CRENAMs), and distributions of free food assistance) will continue through at least the month of June.

Most likely food security outcomes

Households in most pastoral livelihood zones and the Rainfed Cultivation Zone with relatively good pastoral conditions and near-average levels of cereal production will continue to experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity into the month of March. However, there could be above-average levels of food insecurity between March and June with the expected erosion in terms of trade, driven by the falling price of livestock and expected rise in the prices of substitute cereal crops and other staple foods with the mounting demand in the face of the large production deficit. Affected poor households in the central reaches of the Senegal River Valley and northwestern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone may need to resort to irreversible coping strategies to continue to meet their nonfood needs, creating **Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes in these areas through February/March**.

Poor households in the central reaches of the Senegal River Valley and the northern and western reaches of the Agropastoral Zone were left with large shortfalls in their annual cereal production. They continue to rely on market purchase for their food supplies, while facing large gaps in their seasonal incomes, which have been sharply reduced by the combined effects of the slow-down in local income-generating activities, limited volume of migrant remittances, and deterioration in terms of trade with the falling price of livestock. They are having trouble maintaining regular access to an adequate food supply. Their need to ramp up their sales of livestock to maintain their food access on local markets will impair their livelihoods and force them to resort to negative strategies for meeting their food needs and managing their livestock herds. **As such, these households will be in a Crisis (IPC Phase 3) situation as of February/March 2015.**

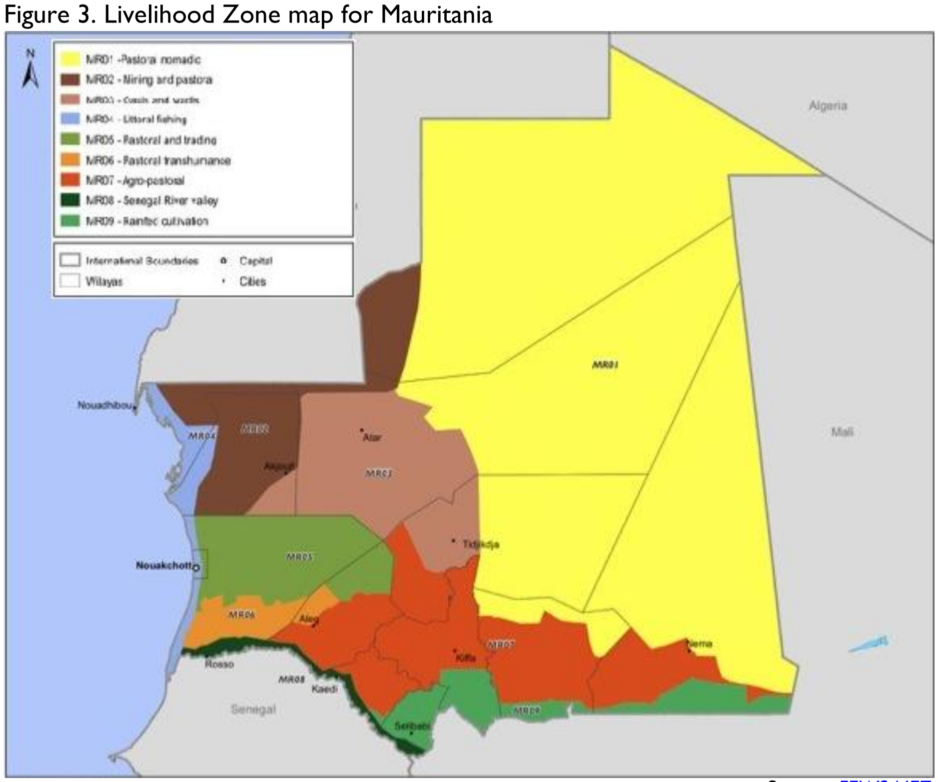
Moreover, as of February, there is a high probability of negative food security outcomes for poor households in the Oasis and Wadis Zone (Livelihoods Zone 3). The severe rainfall deficit has limited market gardening activities (between January and February) and the growing of crops in "*graras*" (depression areas), lowland areas, and down-stream areas (between October and March), which are their main sources of cereals. **These households are likely already facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes** and, thus, having difficulty meeting their nonfood needs.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Central Senegal River Valley area (Livelihood Zone 8)

This livelihood zone covers the southern part of Boghé, Bababé, and M'Bagne departments and the southwestern reaches of Kaédi department. Poor households in this area are highly dependent on both household crop production and farm labor. To supplement their earnings from local employment during the main growing season (between June and October), they head to neighboring areas to look for work after the harvest, particularly after a poor season.

Figure 3. Livelihood Zone map for Mauritania



Source: FEWS NET

Current situation

- The shortfall in cereal production from the November harvest was further aggravated by the limited farming activities in *walo* (floodplain) areas where, with the river failing to reach flood stage, only low-lying areas collecting runoff were planted in crops (less than a quarter of the main *walo* area). On average, the growing of *walo* crops meets 60 percent of the cereal needs of poor households and provides 80 percent of their annual farm income.
- The extremely good yields of "winter" rice crops will give some poor households stocks of paddy rice through the end of February. Certain communities, realizing that the low level of the river will preclude the growing of hot off-season rice crops, have already turned to growing cold off-season crops (legumes and maize).
- Markets are well-stocked with imported staple foodstuffs and substitute cereals (rice and wheat). Prices were stable through December, but could rise sharply between February and June, driven by a strong demand fueled by the limited availability of coarse grains.
- Coarse grains have been in short supply with the shortfall in local production and limited flow of trade from neighboring countries. The result was a sharp 18 percent jump in sorghum prices between November and December.

This rise in sorghum prices is believed to have driven the price of wheat (the lowest-cost substitute cereal) up by 7.2 percent.

- While the locust situation is stable, the light erratic rainfall activity in pastoral areas has produced sparse pastures with limited grass cover, which will not meet the needs of local livestock. Most livestock herds have been migrating to the southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and western reaches of the Rainfed Cultivation Zone since October/November. Livestock prices have been driven down sharply by an unusual seasonal surplus since December with the large sales of animals by pastoralists looking to cut their losses in the face of the poor pastoral conditions in this area.
- The resulting erosion in terms of trade for livestock/cereals and in the purchasing power of poor households reliant on market purchase for their food supplies as a result of the shortfall in their own crop production for this year has been further aggravated by their sharply reduced seasonal incomes for lack of labor-intensive farming activities.
- Despite the higher rates of earlier than usual short-term seasonal labor migration in January (which, on average, does not generally get underway until sometime in March), as yet, there is no evidence of the generation of sufficient migration income to cover household food gaps.
- Government assistance programs (BS, SAVS, CRENAM programs, etc.) are functioning normally, bolstered by new distributions of free food assistance in all municipalities and by food-for-work (FFW) and cash-for-work (CFF) programs in certain areas.

Assumptions

The most likely local food security scenario described below for the period from January through June 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- There will be a limited supply of coarse grains between now and the end of June, if not longer, which are normally the mainstay of the diets of poor households. Net production from *walo* areas will be at barely 15 percent of the average. There will be near-average levels of cold off-season irrigated crop production, but little or no hot off-season crop production, with water levels along the river expected to be too low to meet the needs of these crops.
- Markets will continue to be well-stocked with imported foodstuffs. There will be an extremely limited flow of seasonal domestic trade with the shortfall in cereal production for 2014, aggravated by the failure of flood-recession crops. The severe rainfall deficit in northern Senegal will preclude any improvement in the flow of cross-border trade until the harvest of flood-recession crops (in March 2015).
- The density and quality of pastures are both well-below-average. This will trigger a downward trend in livestock prices, which will pick up speed in rural areas beginning in March as the lean season settles in. Thus, terms of trade will steadily deteriorate, to the detriment of poor households. However, livestock prices in urban areas will stay high due to speculation by traders, who could raise prices according to the physical condition of livestock.
- In spite of the larger number of participants (two to five household members instead of the normal average of one to two members), there will be well-below-average levels of seasonal income from out-of-area work and short-term seasonal labor migration for lack of local and subregional income-generating activities due to the latent effects of the poor growing season.
- Assistance programs conducted by NGOs will shut down between January and March and could be scaled back or relocated. Government programs will continue to operate.

Most likely food security outcome

Poor households in the central reaches of the Senegal River Valley with well-below-average levels of annual crop production and seasonal income will continue to have trouble meeting their nonfood needs. By February, having depleted their stocks of home-grown crops much sooner than usual, their low seasonal incomes will make it difficult for them to meet their food needs. In the absence of intervention for these households, **they will face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes through the end of January before they move to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) beginning in February 2015**.

Northwestern Agropastoral Zone (Livelihood Zone 7)

In general, this area of concern covers northern Gorgol (Monguel department), northern Brakna (Magta Lahjar department), western Assaba (the western part of Barkéol department), and southern Tagant (the southern reaches of Moudjéria department). The main activities engaged in by poor households in this area revolve around farming (the growing of flood recession and rainfed crops) and the tending of livestock. On average, 30 percent of their food needs are met by household crop production and proceeds from crop sales account for 20 percent of their income. Most food purchases are made between March and July, mainly with cash earnings from short-term seasonal labor migration.

Current situation

- Most late-season crops in the western reaches of the Agropastoral Zone have withered for lack of a sufficient supply of water for the normal maturation of rainfed sorghum crops. January/February harvests of these crops generally provide poor households with a supply of cereals and pulses until the harvest of flood-recession crops (in lowland and down-stream areas) in February/March. Thus, poor households will have no fresh crops and will be dependent on market purchase for their food supplies longer than usual.
- Coarse grain supplies are limited. There was little local production and the flow of cross-border trade from Senegal and Mali is still well below-average. However, markets are well-stocked with imported substitute cereals (wheat and rice).
- The rainfall deficits across the area caused crops to fail, driving sorghum prices up 27.9 percent between November and December. Wheat prices are up from last month by 11.9 percent, driven by a growing demand fueled by the limited availability of sorghum.
- The mediocre pastoral conditions are no longer able to meet the needs of local livestock. The limited seasonal milk availability all across the area with the shortfall in pasture production is heightening food insecurity. Transhumant herd movements, underway since October, have intensified and there has been an earlier than usual reliance on animal feed (Rakkel) in the southern reaches of Moudjéria department in southern Tagant since that time.
- In general, sheep prices are down on all rural markets in the Agropastoral Zone (by 49.6 percent from November). Pastoralists have already sold many animals and are continuing to sell more animals out of a fear of potential losses as a result of the pasture deficit. This has created a seasonal surplus of livestock in rural areas, putting traders in a position to dictate low prices.
- Wage rates for herders are stable and their annual incomes are on par with the average. With the departure of transhumant herds limiting the use of casual pastoral labor, households looking to augment their seasonal incomes cannot expect to put more household members to work tending livestock as a way to raise more income.
- The limited demand for farm labor in many parts of this livelihood zone with the small cropped areas in need of harvesting sharply reduced household income (to more than 70 percent below-average) between November and December 2014. These foregone earnings would have enabled poor households to purchase food supplies until the March harvests of flood-recession crops.
- Local wage rates are down by 33 percent from 1,500 MRO to 1000 MRO as a result of the large supply of labor and limited amount of work to be performed with the poor farming conditions in this area and with most local activities funded by crop sales. The limited financial gains from short-term seasonal labor migration have prompted many workforce members to postpone their departure, creating an unemployed or idle labor force.
- Though more members of poor households are engaged in short-term seasonal labor migration, seasonal income levels from this source remain well-below-average.
- Government assistance programs are functioning normally, but certain programs operated by NGOs have been shut down since December.

Assumptions

The most likely local food security scenario described below for the period from January through June 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- The failure of flood-recession crops will heighten the earlier than usual market dependence of area households for their food supplies.
- There will be a limited flow of cross-border and domestic trade through the end of June, if not longer, with the below-average levels of cereal production in border areas. This will trigger an atypical rise in coarse grain prices.
- Retail markets will be well-stocked with imported foodstuffs, but the large shortfall in local cereal production is expected to drive up the prices of substitute cereals (wheat and rice) in spite of continuing assistance programs (BS and SAVS programs).
- Livestock markets will continue to be well-stocked with animals from sales by pastoralists remaining in the area in need of food for their families and animal feed for their sedentary herds. There will likely be lower levels of income from livestock sales between January and June.
- The long lean season will force very poor households and certain poor households to sell more animals, with the risk of exceeding the threshold limit for livestock sales above which they could impair their main livelihood.
- The flow of short-term seasonal labor migration will speed up between March and May with the departure of the remaining rural workforce which, even if it does not generate enough income, still has the advantage of reducing the number of mouths to feed from the household's meager food supplies. However, with no new developments to help boost demand for labor in receiving areas of Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal, it is not expected to generate any more remittance income for family members back home.

Most likely food security outcome

Household members remaining in the area will face food consumption gaps as of February/March. They could make more radical changes to their diets (increasing their wheat consumption as a substitute for overly costly supplies of sorghum and rice) and will limit their food intake. Their search for cash to maintain their food access on local markets will result in larger than average sales of animals, with the risk of creating livelihood protection deficits. There will be less recourse to market purchase and borrowing facilitated by cash transfer program with the termination of these programs in December. **Most poor households will face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes between January and February**, when they will be unable to meet their basic nonfood needs. Conditions could deteriorate to the point where poor households will also have trouble meeting their food needs, **which would put them in a Crisis (IPC Phase 3) situation as of March**.

EVENTS THAT COULD CHANGE THE OUTLOOK

Table 1: Possible events in the next six months that could change the outlook

Area	Event	Impacts on food security conditions
National	Atypical rise in international market prices for wheat and rice	Curtailment of the food access of poor households with the deterioration in terms of trade in the face of the high likelihood of a seasonal decline in livestock prices
	Long-term disruption in cross-border trade	Steady rise in coarse grain prices, driving up the prices of substitute cereals (wheat and rice)
	Shutdown of assistance programs by NGOs before June	High likelihood of a rise in food prices, sharply curtailing the food access of poor households
Agropastoral Zone and Senegal River Valley	Restrictions on long-term migration by transhumant livestock	Higher animal mortality rates, sharply degrading livelihoods and producing below-average supplies of food and income
	Additional assistance programs for poor households	Improvement in household food availability and less pressure on their livestock herds
	Failure of cold off-season irrigated crops	Heightened market dependence Sharper decline in seasonal income and in-kind wages for related work
	Sharp rise in the prices of substitute cereals (wheat and rice)	Limited household food access
	Sharp decline in the price of livestock	Sharp depreciation in terms of trade to the detriment of poor households
	Larger volume of Senegalese exports of (local and imported) rice and coarse grains	Better market supplies of cereals, possibly reducing or, at least, stabilizing prices
	Releases of water from the Manantalli dam beginning as of November	The higher level of the river will ensure poor households a successful growing season for cold and hot off-season crops, producing better cereal availability and higher household incomes compared with figures for October.

ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

To project food security outcomes over a six-month period, FEWS NET develops a set of assumptions about likely events, their effects, and the probable responses of various actors. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to develop scenarios predicting food security outcomes. Typically, FEWS NET reports the most likely scenario. Learn more here.