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FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS NETWORK

MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook — June 2017 to January 2018

Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity likely across the country as of October

KEY MESSAGES

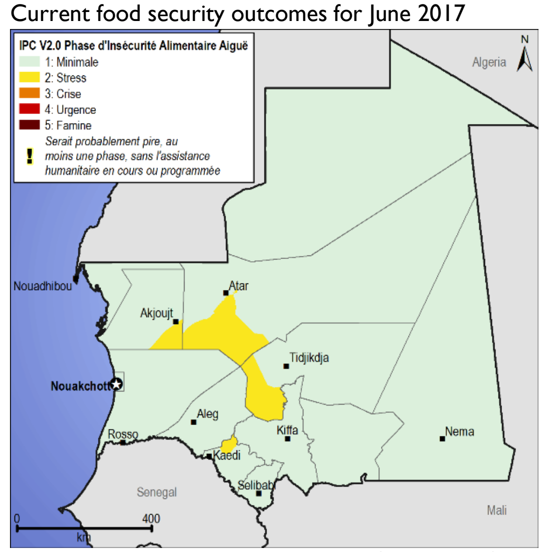
- Good imported supplies of international foods (wheat, rice, wheat flour, sugar, oil, milk, and tea) on retail markets are ensuring good food availability across the country despite the decline in national crop production and cross-border cereal trade with Mali.

- The limited availability of coarse cereals is triggering sharper than average rises in sorghum, maize, and millet prices. Livestock prices are moving in opposite directions, with prices in rural areas atypically low and sharp rises in prices in urban areas and on assembly markets frequented by traders stocking up on supplies for the upcoming holidays (Korité, marking the end of Ramadan, and Tabaski).

- In general, pastoral conditions around the country are still adequate in spite of the increasingly large pockets of pasture shortages due to rainfall deficits (in western agropastoral areas) or overgrazing by transhumant livestock herds (in central and southern agropastoral areas). Birth rates are in line with the average and milk production is down, in line with normal seasonal trends.

- The lean season has started in most rural areas (with the probable exception of oasis areas, where date production is currently underway). Based on rainfall forecasts, it should extend through the month of July and, as usual, start to wind down between August and October with the improvement in milk production (as of July) and the harvests between September and October. Only poor households in the western part of the agropastoral zone may continue to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions due to their continuing livelihood protection deficits for the past several years.

Current food security outcomes for June 2017



Source: *FEWS NET*

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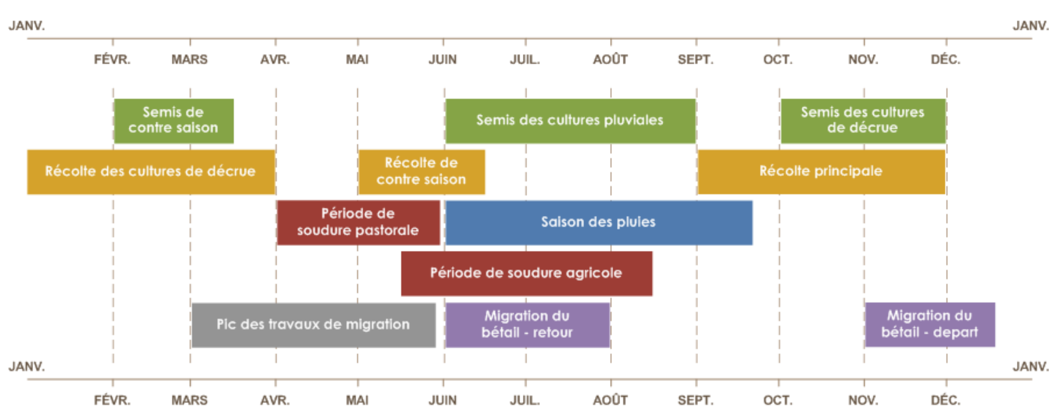
SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

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USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Current situation

Agroclimatology: The current dry season, with its above-average temperatures and stronger than usual winds rapidly drying up surface water sources and uprooting pasture in areas with fragile soils (central and southwestern agropastoral areas and northern rainfed farming areas), is coming to an end with the first rainfall in the southeastern part of the country.

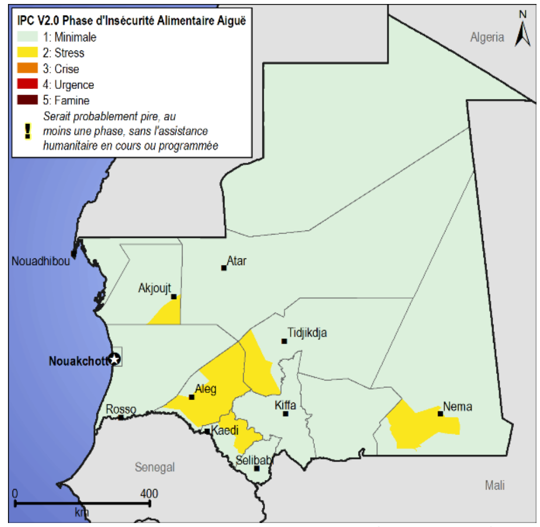
Farming conditions: The harvest of flood-recession crops is completed. Production levels in the western reaches of the agropastoral zone are well below-average.
The growing season for off-season rice crops is underway, but the size of the cropped area has decreased sharply from 2016 and is well below the five-year seasonal average due to problems of access to farm credit.
As the market gardening season comes to an end in oasis areas, crop production levels are close to normal and date production is going well. There are already reports of green crop consumption.

Locust situation: According to the latest bulletin by the National Locust Control Center (CNLA) published in May, the locust situation is stable.

Pastoral conditions: Pastures are still meeting the grazing needs of domestic livestock. Seasonal herd movements by transhumant livestock are dictated mainly by problems with access to animal watering holes, exacerbated by the hotter and more frequent than usual winds. In general, these movements are confined to normal migration routes but are putting heavy pressure on pastures in the central reaches of the agropastoral zone, where local livestock herds have already headed to southern agropastoral and rainfed farming areas. Annual birth rates and the decline in milk production are in line with normal seasonal trends.

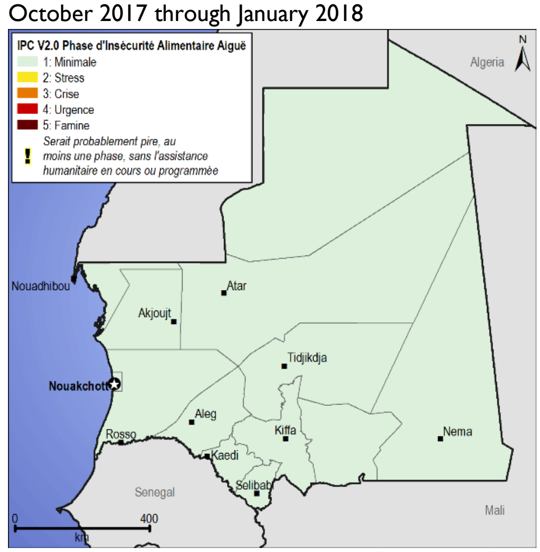
Seasonal income: The seasonal decline in household income is clearly at odds with normal trends at this time of year, when earnings by poor households from farm labor between February and May are usually bolstered by migration income from short-term seasonal labor migration. Current levels of migration income are estimated, at best, at 25 percent of the average, which is generally between 5,000 and 10,000 MRO per month. The effects of the larger pool of migrant workers and their earlier than usual departure are limited by their difficulty finding employment in destination areas (Mauritanian, Malian, and Senegalese cities).

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for June through September 2017



Source: *FEWS NET*

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for October 2017 through January 2018



Source: *FEWS NET*

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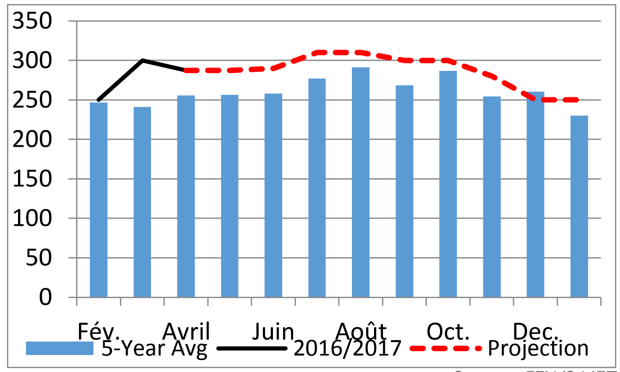
Cross-border trade: There is a below-average volume of cross-border trade with Mali with the shortfall in cereal production in areas driving this type of trade. This is affecting supplies on Mauritanian markets from rainfed farming areas and the southern part of the agropastoral zone. The result is a growing recourse to wheat, which is readily available on formal markets and in government-subsidized shops (*boutiques de solidarité*). There has been a sharp decline in rice imports from Senegal, while the flow of imported fruits and vegetables from Morocco is picking up.

Retail markets: All retail markets are well-stocked with imported staple foods (wheat, rice, oil, sugar, flour, etc.) In general, wheat prices in most livelihood zones have been relatively stable over the past month, except in oasis areas where they are down by seven percent with date consumption sharply reducing local demand for wheat. With the supply of sorghum limited by the national production deficit and slowdown in imports from Mali, sorghum prices in all parts of the country are up sharply (by 6.5 percent on the Adel Bagrou market in the country's rainfed farming zone just across the border from Mali, nine percent on the Aoujeft market in the oasis zone, and 51 percent on the Magta Lahjar market in the agropastoral zone, which had the year's largest annual cereal production deficit. The only reported decline in sorghum prices was in the Senegal River Valley (on the Boghé market), where the presence of sorghum (*walo*) crops from flood-recession farming areas of Mauritania and Senegal harvested in March bolstered market supplies, driving down its price by 7.4 percent. There are still operational "*boutiques de solidarité*" (subsidized food shops) in all parts of the country stocked with staple foodstuffs (wheat, locally grown rice, oil, sugar, and milk) by the government sold at prices 30 to 40 percent below formal market prices.

Livestock markets: In line with seasonal trends, supplies on all livestock markets are low (well below supply levels at the same time in 2016). Thus, livestock prices are steadily rising according to normal seasonal trends, though only in urban areas and on assembly markets frequented by traders. Prices in rural areas are down sharply, particularly in the western part of the agropastoral zone (on the Magta Lahjar market) where atypical sales of animals for the purchasing of food supplies in the face of the large production deficit in that area have driven the price of an average sheep down by 28.6 percent, accentuating the downward trend in prices observed since January with the failure of rainfed crops.

Figure 1. Trends in sorghum prices on the Magta Lahjar market



Source: *FEWS NET*

Food and nutrition: In spite of the reportedly large shortfall in annual crop production in certain pockets in the agropastoral zone and rainfed farming zone, there are still no signs of food consumption gaps capable of downgrading the food security status of areas inhabited by poor households from mainly Stressed (IPC Phase 2) to a Crisis (IPC Phase 3) situation. Current coping strategies are mainly affecting livelihoods, particularly livestock, whose sale provides poor households with food access while, at the same time, allowing food lending systems to continue to operate by helping to ensure partial repayments. However, very poor households in certain pockets in the western reaches of the agropastoral zone (Moudjéria, Monguel, Magta Lahjar, M'Bout, and Kankossa) are having difficulty coping with the Stressed (IPC Phase 2) conditions in these areas. With the mass sales of animals by large-scale livestock producers already starting up in the eastern part of the agropastoral zone (in central Nema and Timbédra), the same phenomenon forcing poor households to resort to atypical sales of livestock in late 2016/early 2017 is likely to repeat itself, translating into livelihood protection deficits.
Poor households unaccustomed to having to face the lean season before the beginning of June have been feeling the effects of the failure of flood recession crops and rapid deterioration in pastoral conditions in the northern reaches of Boghé, Bababé, and M'Bagne departments since the month of March.
Global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates should stay in line with the average.

Assumptions

The most likely nationwide food security scenario for the period from June 2017 through January 2018 is based on the following general assumptions:

- **Rainfall conditions**. Forecasts by the 2017 seasonal climate forecasting forum for the Sudano-Sahelian region of Africa are predicting above-normal levels of cumulative rainfall and an earlier than usual start-of-season, which could trigger flooding and plant health problems. The extended dry spells expected early in the season could also affect crop growth. A premature end-of-season is also likely though, according to the latest NOAA forecasts, there is nothing to indicate that this will be the case, which would expose crops to drought risks and would likely reduce crop yields.

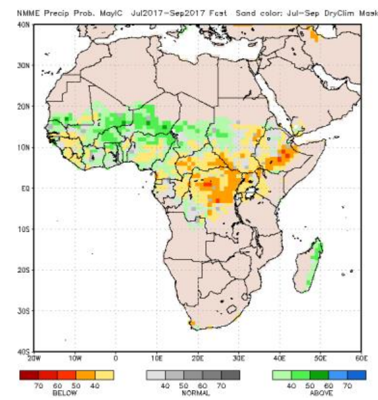
- **Agro-climatic conditions**: There will be normal levels of flooding from the river, inundating the river valley beginning in July and peaking between August and September.

- **Crop production**: Rainfall rates will be in line with the average, with the possibility of above-normal cumulative annual rainfall totals. As a result, there should also be average yields of long-cycle sorghum and millet crops (planted in July and harvested in late October and throughout November), which account for over 60 percent of rainfed crop production. Likewise, crop yields from short-cycle crops grown between June and September should be in line with the average. The limited access of farmers with outstanding debts to farm credit is expected to scale back the size of the area planted in irrigated rice crops and, thus, put rainy-season crop production below the figure for 2016 (which was already below the five-year average due to this same problem). The failure to implement any bird control measures to date makes a decline in crop production compared with 2016 that much more likely. There will be average yields of market garden crops in oasis areas and the river valley between October and January. Yields of seasonal market garden crops in major oasis areas are expected to be at least on par with the average.

- **Commercial imports**: There should be a regular, adequate flow of imports to sustain domestic market supplies and re-exports to neighboring countries (Mali and Senegal) and the southern Maghreb. The already lighter than average flow of cross-border cereal trade with Mala could pick up with the early start of the rainy season, which may reassure Malian farmers and encourage them to unload their crops.

- **"EMEL" program shops**: These subsidized shops are expected to continue to operate normally throughout the outlook period, selling foodstuffs at prices 30 to 40 percent below formal market prices. This should help improve the food access of poor households, for which the sharp drop in their annual incomes (putting them 50 to 75 percent below-average) poses an obstacle surmountable only by resorting to atypical sales of animals translating into livelihood protection deficits.

Figure 2: NMME rainfall forecast for July through September 2017



Source: *NOAA*

- **International and regional market drivers:** There is little likelihood of a disruption in trade networks for food exports. Thus, the country is not expected to face a shortage of food supplies any time during the outlook period.

- **Livestock prices**: The upward movement in livestock prices in most livelihood zones is expected to pick up speed with the holiday season between June and October. The current downward trend in sheep prices in rural agropastoral areas should gradually reverse itself, particularly with the start-up of farming activities serving as a source of income generation enabling poor households to purchase food supplies. These households will no longer be forced to sell off their animals in order to eat and the low supply of livestock in these areas should help allow livestock prices to rebound.

- **Farm labor**: Based on current forecasts predicting an earlier than usual rainy season, there will be average levels of seasonal income from farm labor between June and September and from primarily harvesting and ancillary activities between September and November. The expected downsizing of cropped areas in rice-growing zones due to the lack of access to farm credit by farmers with outstanding debts is also likely to reduce incomes, though it should not affect daily wage rates (around 2000 MRO/day).

- **Wild plant foods:** The expected normal rainfall conditions in the central, northern, and western reaches of the country should produce average yields of wild fruits ready for picking between September and October. There will be average levels of date production between June and the beginning of August.

- **Pastoral conditions:** The early start of the rains will help produce new green pasture growth by the beginning of July. This would eliminate the need to purchase animal feed (with the resulting savings used to buy food supplies), trigger return migration by transhumant livestock herds, and help jump-start milk production. Together, these three phenomena will help strengthen household food access.

- **Migratory movements and migration income:** As is generally the case, migrant workers should return home sometime between May and the beginning of July to engage in farming activities. Their return is expected to sharpen the decline in income levels from short-term seasonal labor migration, which are already well-below average.

Most likely food security outcomes

June to September: The earlier than usual onset of the rainy season will jump-start farming and pastoral activities. The income and food supplies generated by these activities should, logically, reduce pressure on livestock which, until this point, were being used to feed the household. The Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions fostered by livelihood protection deficits in the western reaches of the agropastoral zone (in Aleg, Magta Lahjar, Moudjéria, Monguel, and M'Bout departments, the northern part of Boghé, Bababé, and M'Bagne departments, the western part of Kankossa department, and the northern reaches of Ould Yengé) should ease, leaving Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity.

October 2017 to January 2018: Barring any market shocks, crop yields, good pastoral conditions, and income from ancillary activities for rainfed crops and from crop planting activities in flood recession farming areas once the floodwaters recede should bring down seasonal household food insecurity to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) levels.

EVENTS THAT COULD CHANGE THE OUTLOOK

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

Area	Event	Impacts on food security conditions
International	Deregulation of international wheat markets	The rising price of wheat will mainly affect poor households consuming more and more wheat in place of sorghum and rice.
National	Sizeable improvement in the flow of cross-border trade with Mali	Better market supplies in rainfed farming areas and the southern part of the agropastoral zone, reducing demand for wheat and, thus, at the very least, most likely stabilizing its price
National	Termination of the government assistance program with the shutdown of government-subsidized "*boutiques de solidarité*"	Poor households will be forced to turn to formal markets, whose (30 to 40 percent) higher prices will curtail their food access and impact terms of trade for livestock/food, to their detriment. This is likely to result in even larger sales of animals than in past years.
National	Lack of concerted bird control efforts with neighboring countries (Senegal and Mali)	Attacks on flood recession and rice crops, affecting farmers in the Senegal River Valley area.
National	Locust infestation	Destruction of crops and pastures.

ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

To project food security outcomes over the upcoming eight-month period, FEWS NET develops a set of basic 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 bases its projections on the most likely scenario. Learn more here.