Food insecurity persists in the central-south of the country even in the post-harvest period

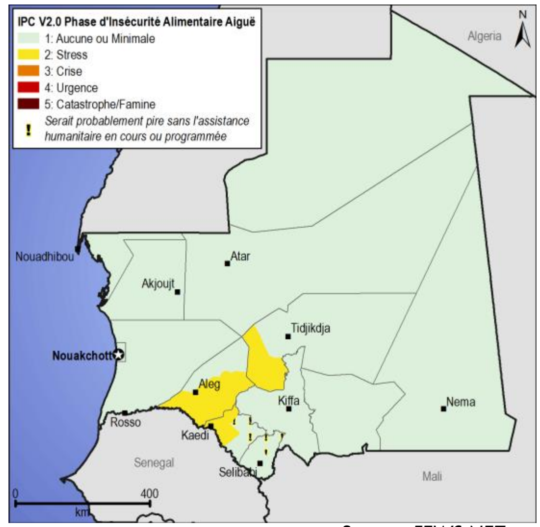
KEY MESSAGES

- With the rains in September failing to spur farming activities in the Senegal River Valley and Agropastoral Zone, poor households are facing large shortfalls in their harvest production and seasonal incomes. Even with the favorable terms of trade for sheep to cereals, they are having difficulty meeting their basic nonfood needs and, thus, will remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through the end of January.

- The reduction in cropping (both for flood recession and rainfed cropping) and income-generating activities in both livelihood zones are expected to hasten the start of the lean season (which will begin three months earlier than usual) and lead to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) conditions in these areas between February and March.

- Conditions in other livelihood zones are currently evolving to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity after the rainy season, bolstered by average seasonal incomes, the availability of fresh crops from recent harvests (in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and eastern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone), and/or the improvement in pastoral conditions (in pastoral zones).

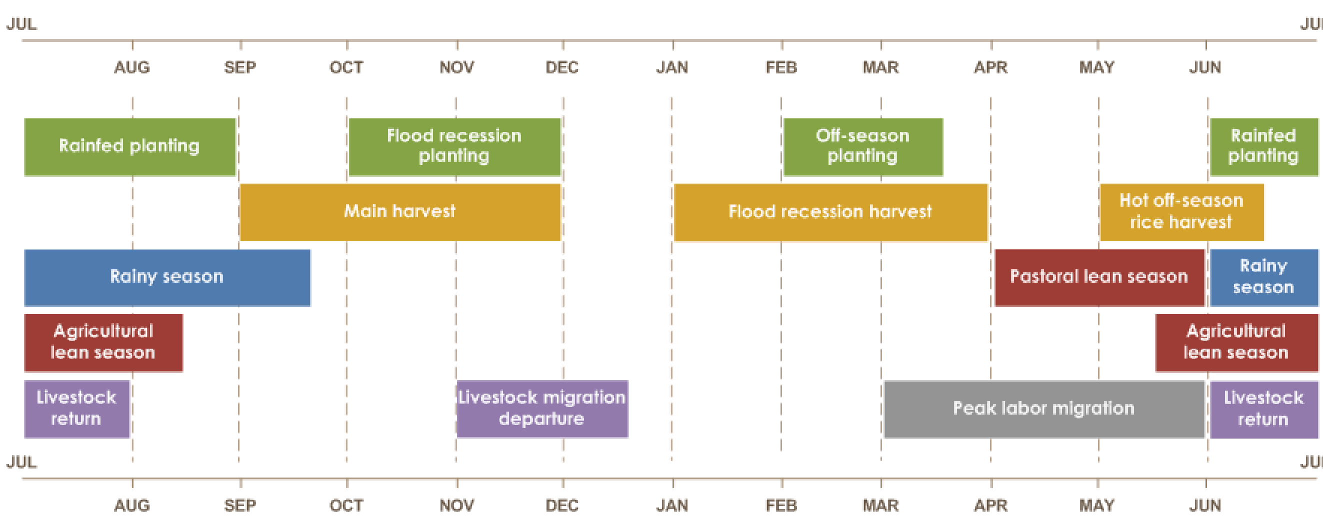
Most likely estimated food security outcomes for October 2014



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



Source: *FEWS NET*

FEWS NET MAURITANIA
fews.mauritania@fews.net
www.fews.net

FEWS NET is a USAID-funded activity. The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Current situation

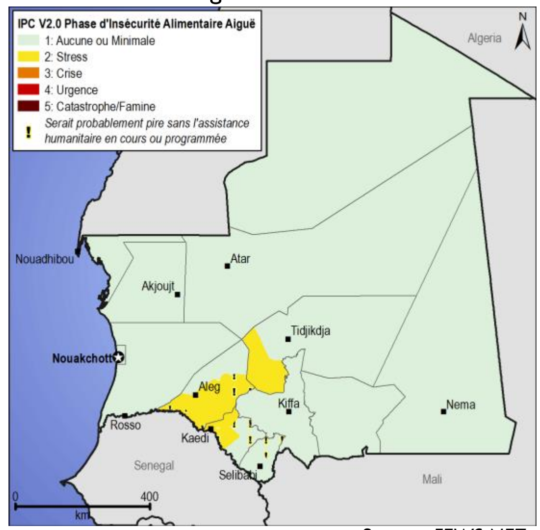
Rainfall: The emd of September was marked by erratic, extremely limited rainfall activity. Thus, in spite of the earlier than usual start of the rains (in May/June instead of June/July), there were frequent, long dry spells, with cumulative seasonal and annual rainfall totals well below figures for 2013 at the same time of year (80 percent of rainfall gauging stations show rainfall deficits) as well as the average (Figure 1).

Cropping conditions: The size of the area planted in crops in all rainfed farming areas in the southern part of the country was down from last year and below-average. In addition, the light end-of-season rains could hinder crop growth and development. Only the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone are expected to produce as much as two thirds of an average harvest of rainfed cereal crops after the long lag in the planting of short-cycle crops, which will be harvested in early October (instead of late September, which is the regular harvesting period), and late-season crops which, with the cool temperatures associated with the cold season, will not be harvested until January/February, one to two months late.

Water levels in lowland areas, which are particularly extensive in the central and northern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone, vary widely from one livelihood zone to another and even within the same livelihood zone. They are especially low compared with the average in the Senegal River Valley and Agropastoral Zone in the south-central reaches of the country, where there was a poor spatial-temporal distribution of rainfall. The situation in these areas is similar to the situation in rainfed farming areas, where cropping rates by local households were below-average.

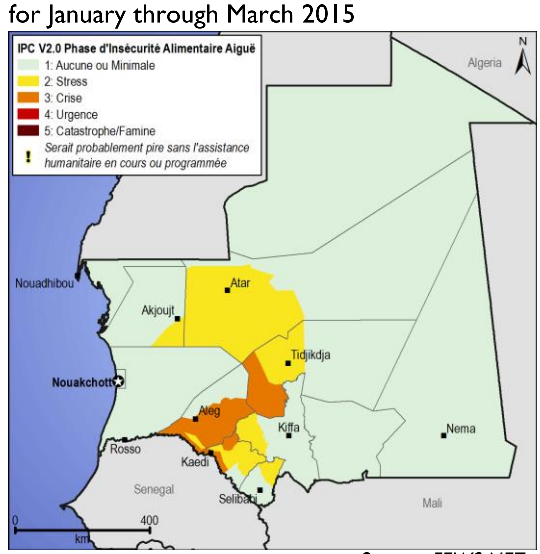
Most *walo* areas (floodplain areas along the Senegal River and its tributaries and river bank areas), whose cultivation, on average, meets half the cereal needs of poor households in the Senegal River Valley and southwestern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone benefiting from these farming activities and provides three quarters of their seasonal farm income, are dry. These low-lying areas collecting runoff from the river and a number of streams could be farmed, but any such crops will face the same challenges (wandering animals, stalk borers, withering risks, etc.) as with in the Agropastoral Zone. There are still good prospects for the cultivation of irrigated main season crops on tracts of land relatively close in size to figures for 2013, which are making good progress and whose yields should match if not surpass the production figure for 2013, which set a ten-year record.

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for October through December 2014



Source: *FEWS NET*

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for January through March 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.

Locusts: The locust situation across the country is stable. However, farmers in all crop-growing areas were cautious of potential stalk borer pests and grain eating birds threats during the cropping season.

Pastoral conditions: There is a visible improvement in the level of grass cover all across the Agropastoral Zone. There are currently plentiful woody and grass pastures in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and pasture resources in other pastoral areas should meet the needs of local livestock at least through the month of January. The large supply of surface water is limiting herd movements, though return migration by transhumant livestock has visibly slowed, with most herds still ensconced in seasonal grazing areas in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone. For the time being, the use of animal feed is limited to the northwestern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone (to a few grazing enclaves in Moudjéria department in southern Tagant). An examination of animal health conditions shows no epizootic outbreaks anywhere in the country.

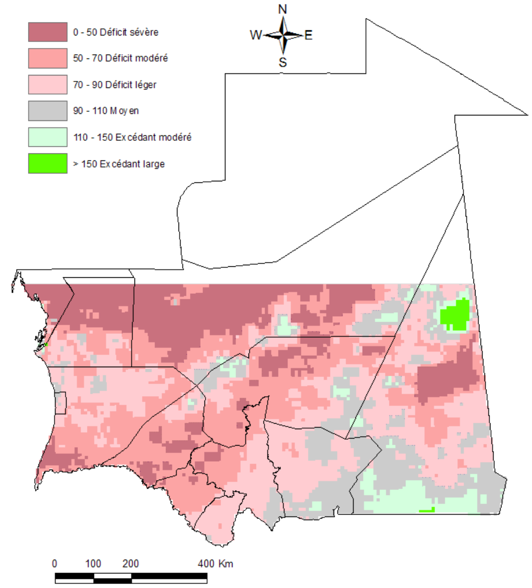
Average September prices for sheep in all parts of the country were up from figures for 2013 at the same time of year and from July of this year and above the five-year average, fueled by high domestic and foreign demand for the celebration of Tabaski (there were orders for 700,000 animals from Senegal). The largest reported price increase (53 percent) was on the Boghé market, a major source market for Senegal. Average prices for sheep in the Agropastoral Zone (on the Magta Lahjar market) were also up from July and from the same time last year and above the five-year average.

With the rising price of livestock, terms of trade are relatively better than they were in 2013. The expected recourse to wheat (the main substitute cereal available on local markets at competitive prices) by poor households should further improve coverage of household food needs in all parts of the country with the sole exception of the Rainfed Cultivation Zone, where the presence of Malian refugees, who are heavy consumers of wheat, is creating a high demand for this cereal crop.

Seasonal incomes: Poor households in all parts of the country with the exception of the western reaches of the Senegal River Valley (southern Trarza), where farming activities for the growing of irrigated main season crops helped local households earn near-average seasonal incomes, could find themselves with well-below-average levels of seasonal income in spite of the relatively stable average wage rates for day laborers due to the limited supply of work. The volume of earlier than usual short-term seasonal labor migration is still limited, with large numbers of workers employed in ongoing farming activities (for rainfed and irrigated crops) or waiting for the floodwaters to recede (in the Agropastoral Zone).

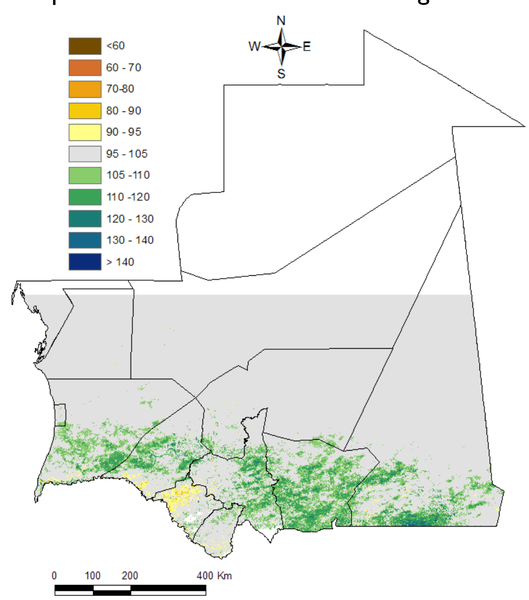
Markets and prices: Retail markets are still well-stocked with imported staple foodstuffs (rice, wheat, sugar, and oil), but prices are high, fueled by a heightened demand for imported cereals with the large shortfalls in coarse grain production in most rural areas. The sharp reduction in the use of wheat as animal feed with the improvement in pastoral conditions and distributions of free food assistance (in the form of wheat) have kept wheat prices in the Agropastoral Zone (on the Magta Lahjar market) relatively stable compared with figures for 2013 at the same time of year. On the other hand, wheat prices in areas with large shortfalls in rainfed crop production (in the Senegal River Valley and the Rainfed Cultivation Zone) are up sharply (by 40.35 percent on the Adel Bagrou market in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and 11.11 percent on the Boghé market in the Senegal River Valley). They are also above the five-year (2009/2013) average, except in the Oasis Zone, where the large supply of locally grown rice has sharply reduced demand.

Figure 1. Rainfall (RFE) anomalies for the period from April 1st through October 10th compared with the 2009-2013 average



Source: *USGS/FEWS NET*

Figure 2. NDVI anomalies for October 10th compared with the 2001 – 2010 average



Source: *USGS/FEWS NET*

Though still below figures for 2013 at the same time of year, sorghum prices on the Magta Lahjar market monitored by FEWS NET are up sharply (by 43.75 percent), where there is a large demand for seeds for late-season rainfed crops. Cereal traders in the Senegal River Valley with stockpiled inventories which they had counted on selling as seeds are currently being forced to unload them for lack of buyers while, in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone, the usual unloading of crops by Malian farmers just before the harvest appears to have succeeded in increasing supplies, reversing the upward trend in prices.

Assumptions

The most likely nationwide food security scenario for the period from October 2014 through March 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- With the light rainfall activity and poor temporal distribution of rainfall affecting the progress of rainfed crops, rainfed cereal production is expected to fall well short of figures for 2013 and the average.
- Poor households will succeed in getting hold of needed supplies of seeds for the planting of floodplain areas in flood recession crops. However, the size of viable areas for the growing of flood recession crops (lowland, dam, and *walo* areas) will be well below-average in all parts of the country due to the low water levels in depression areas and the low level of the Senegal River. The premature recession of the floodwaters in the River Valley is limiting farming activities in river bank areas, which normally provide a food supply for poor households (maize, cowpeas, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, okra, etc.) between November and February.
- Irrigated main season crop production will match if not surpass figures for 2013, but there will be little cold and hot off-season crop production with the currently low level of the Senegal River and its tributaries.
- Market garden production will be in line with irrigated crop production, with near-average yields between October and January but little to no output between February and March.
- Pastoral conditions in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone will meet the needs of local livestock between now and March, if not longer, but conditions in other livelihood zones will meet livestock needs only until January/February.
- Animal birthing rates will be below-average between October and March due to the mediocre condition of existing pastures, except in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone. However, there will be more than enough milk production to meet household consumption needs between October and December.
- Short-term seasonal labor migration should speed up after the end of November, but is not expected to produce any major spin-off effects due to the limited supply of work in both farming and urban areas. There will be less migration income throughout the outlook period due to the limited supply of farm work, the normal source of employment for over 70 percent of migrant workers.
- Poor households in most areas will have well-below-average incomes from farm labor throughout the outlook period. There will be average levels of wage income from pastoral activities between October and January, which will be scaled back between February and March by the premature departure of transhumant herds from most pastoral areas for the southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and the Rainfed Cultivation Zone.

Market behavior and price trends:

- There will be a regular flow of adequate market supplies to meet domestic consumption needs and for re-exports to Senegal, Mali, and the southern Maghreb region of North Africa.
- Cross-border trade in coarse grains will rebound as of October, though its volume and duration will be well-below-average with the expected shortfalls in cereal production in border areas of Senegal and certain parts of Mali. There will be a stable if not growing volume of re-exports of Asian rice from Senegal through December. There will be larger than average re-exports of imported foodstuffs (oil, sugar, wheat flour, noodles, etc.) to Mali, Senegal, and the southern Maghreb region in all border areas.
- Prices for imported foodstuffs and coarse grains will rise in-line with normal seasonal trends.
- There will be a larger than average decline in livestock prices in rural areas as of December due to the already ongoing herd thinning activities in these areas, as sedentary pastoralists continue to ramp up their sales of animals to get them through the long lean season, which is expected to get underway by January. Prices will stay high in urban areas, where retailers have entered into tacit agreements with importers to purchase animals at certain prices which cannot be adjusted downwards without risking a loss.

Assistance:

- Current assistance programs will remain operational through December. While government programs (village-level food security reserve programs (SAVS), government-subsidized shops (BS), outpatient therapeutic feeding centers (CRENAMs), and distributions of free food assistance) are likely to be extended through March, there is still some uncertainty with respect to the sustainability of the cash transfer, cash-for-work, and food-for-work programs currently operated by certain NGOs (Action Against Hunger, OXFAM, etc.)

Most likely food security outcomes

The improvement in pastoral conditions in most pastoral areas and the Rainfed Cultivation Zone, where pasture deficits were partially reversed by the rebound in rainfall activity in September, helped ease the Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions in these areas during the lean season. Yields of rainfed cereal crops in the eastern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone and Rainfed Cultivation Zone, however low they may be compared with an average harvest, will propel poor households into a state of Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity through at least the end of March.

Poor households in the central reaches of the Senegal River Valley and northern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone still dependent on local markets for their food supplies for lack of seasonal rainfed crop production are having difficulty maintaining regular, adequate food access. The limited demand for farm labor has reduced their income, while prices for many staple foodstuffs (sorghum, locally grown rice, oil, etc.) are rising. **Thus, these households are still Stressed (IPC Phase 2), even during the current post-harvest period, and could be facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) conditions between February and March 2015. There is also a strong presumption of the creation of Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions in pastoral, oasis, and wadi areas by February**, where severe rainfall deficits are endangering market garden crops (grown between November and February) and threatening farming activities in *grara* (depression), lowland, and dam areas (between October and March), which are the main source of cereal supplies for poor households.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Central Senegal River Valley - Livelihood Zone 8

This livelihood zone includes 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 migrate to neighboring areas to look for work after the harvest, particularly after a poor season.

Current situation

- The poor spatial-temporal distribution of rainfall is limiting rainfed farming activities and the late flooding of the Senegal River or lack of runoff from the river are expected to further exacerbate shortfalls in crop production. On average, the growing of *walo* (flood recession) crops in floodplain areas meets 60 percent of the cereal needs of poor households and provides 80 percent of their annual farm income. Despite getting off to an extremely late start, the growing season for irrigated rice crops appears to be going well. However, with the low level of the river, there will be a shortage of water for the growing of hot off-season crops beginning in February/March. The stable locust situation and steady deterioration in environmental conditions conducive to locust breeding activities should help promote normal crop and pasture growth and development.
- Green short-cycle crops in the Rainfed Cultivation Zone and southern reaches of the Agropastoral Zone have been available for household consumption since the beginning of October (instead of the beginning of September, as is normally the case).
- The erratic, light rainfall activity has produced sparse pastures with a limited supply of grasses which, in any case, should meet the needs of local livestock through the end of December.
- The limited supply of coarse grains is driving prices up sharply, fueled by needs for seeds. However, markets are still well-stocked with staple foodstuffs, whose prices, though high, have been stable for the past few months. Nevertheless, this good food availability does not ensure good food access due to the falling prices of livestock with the large supply of animals in the aftermath of the Feast of Tabaski. This trend is already extremely apparent on the Boghé market, where cattle prices (prices for two-year-old bull calves) fell by approximately 30 percent between the end of August and the middle of September.

- As a result, poor households turning to local markets for their food supplies are seeing a deterioration in terms of trade for their livestock and in their purchasing power. The situation is further exacerbated by their sharply reduced seasonal incomes due to a lack of labor-intensive farming activities. Despite a certain amount of earlier than usual short-term seasonal labor migration (which, on average, does not begin until the month of March), it is not expected to contribute enough to fill food consumption gaps.
- Government assistance programs (government-subsidized shops, village-level food security reserves, outpatient therapeutic feeding centers, etc.) are functioning normally, bolstered by new distributions of free food assistance in all municipalities and food-for-work (FFW) and cash-for-work programs in certain areas.

Assumptions

The most likely local food security scenario described below for the period from October 2014 through March 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- The lack of flood waters from the river will mean minimal *walo* production. The only viable areas for the planting of crops will be depression areas collecting runoff or fed by streams. Rainfed cereal production in most crop-producing areas is expected to be mediocre to nil compared with the five-year average.
- Irrigated crops are making normal progress, but poor households will still have difficulty gaining access to sufficient resources for the optimal farming of the small plots of land (1/4 hectare) allocated to each farm operator.
- Markets will continue to be well-stocked with imported foodstuffs. The flow of seasonal domestic trade will be extremely limited due to last year's cereal deficits, which have been exacerbated by the failure of short-cycle crops in most parts of the Agropastoral Zone and Senegal River Valley. The severe rainfall deficit in northern Senegal will prevent a rebound in cross-border trade before the harvest of flood-recession crops (in March). Pasture density and quality are still well-below-average.
- The decline in livestock prices since September, which is already noticeable in rural areas, will accelerate as of December, as demand for animals, sustained by returning pilgrims and needs for the feast of *Mowloud* and the Muslim New Year, begins to falter. The need for animal feed will prompt pastoralists to ramp up their sales of livestock, but livestock prices in urban areas will stay high on account of the pressure placed on retail traders by their inflationary business arrangements (with retailers buying animals on credit at an average price payable to corresponding importers) and costs (taxes, animal feed, guards, etc.).
- With the increasing supply of short-term seasonal labor migration (which has already begun), will coincide with limited production of *walo* crops, particularly downstream from the Manantalli dam.

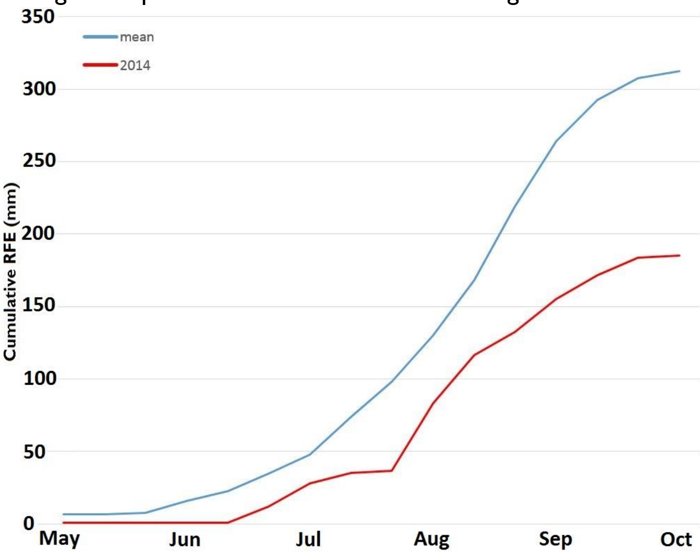
Most likely food security outcome

Poor households in the central reaches of the River Valley whose crop production and seasonal incomes are well-below-average are still having trouble meeting their nonfood needs. By February, with the much earlier than usual depletion of their stocks of home-grown crops, they will begin having difficulty meeting their food needs as well on account of their low seasonal incomes**. Thus, they will remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through January and will be propelled into a state of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) by February 2015** in the absence of humanitarian assistance.

Northwestern Agropastoral - Livelihood Zone 7

In general, this area of concern includes 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, crop production by local households meets 30 percent of their food needs and proceeds from crop sales account for 20 percent of their income. Most food purchases are made between March and June, mainly with earnings from short-term seasonal labor migration.

Figure 3. Cumulative rainfall totals (RFE) for 2014 in Monguel, Gorgol compared with the 2000 – 2013 average



Source of data: *USGS/FEWS NET*

Current situation

- All rainfall gauge stations in this area are reporting large rainfall deficits compared with 2013 as well as the average (see Figure 3 for the case of Gorgol), as well as a poor temporal distribution of rainfall. As a result, pastoral conditions across the area are mediocre, though still able to meet the current needs of local livestock. Certain pastoralists in the southern reaches of Moudjéria department in southern Tagant are already resorting to the premature use of animal feed. For the time being, the effects of the pastoral assistance program selling 50 kg sacks of animal feed at a pr ice of 2,000 MRO are still limiting the use of wheat as animal feed. However, this program only helps middle-income and better-off pastoralists able to purchase feed by the ton and not poor households, who can only afford to buy feed in smaller quantities (by the bag). This will drive livestock prices below reported price levels since the beginning of the year, with an especially sharp decline in prices in rural areas.
- The erratic rainfall activity forced poor households to replant their crops several times. Households choosing to focus on short-cycle crops did not start consuming home-grown green crops until the end of September (which is generally the harvesting period). The failure of long-cycle crops prompted many farmers to turn to late-season crops, which will not be ready for harvesting until January/February. As a result, most poor households have been forced to continue to purchase their food supplies longer than usual. This state of affairs is further complicated by the poor seasonal availability of milk throughout the livelihood zone on account of existing pasture deficits.
- In addition to current shortfalls in cereal production, coarse grain supplies on area markets are low as a result of the poor 2013 harvest of flood recession crops and limited volume of cross-border trade with Mali and Senegal keeping local markets stocked during the lean season. There is very little domestic trade, most of which is destined for markets in local capitals. Prices for sorghum, the staple cereal of choice for poor farming-oriented agropastoral households, are only slightly above figures for 2013 and the five-year average (by 5.3 percent) due to the large availability of wheat in government-subsidized shops (BS) and through humanitarian assistance programs.
- Markets are still well-stocked with imported substitute cereals (wheat and rice). The large supply of wheat, the main substitute foodstuff for poor households, has kept its price relatively stable. In addition to market supplies from traders, it is also sold in government-subsidized shops (BS), is available from village-level food security reserves (SAVS), and is the sole cereal distributed by food assistance programs.
- Though wage rates for herders are stable, the migration of transhumant livestock to seasonal grazing areas will limit the use of casual pastoral labor. With the small areas planted in crops in many areas limiting demand for farm labor, there will be less wage income from this source. Earnings from short-term seasonal labor migration have fallen off with the return of migrant workers in July. There is a growing flow of migrant workers returning to out-migration areas, as well as a new flow of out-migration from these areas (much earlier than usual, which does not generally start until after the end of March). However, it is still too soon to expect any major spin-off effects from these migratory movements.

Assumptions

The most likely local food security scenario described below for the period from October 2014 through March 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- With the erratic rainfall activity affecting their farming and pastoral activities, at best, crop production by poor households will amount to a mere 30 percent of an average harvest. Thus, they will continue to resort to (formal and subsidized) market purchases and borrowing to meet their food needs, while their incomes are as much as 60 to 70 percent below-average.

- 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 the pursuit of ongoing assistance programs (BS and SAVS programs).
- The long lean season beginning in March has already caused most poor households to reach if not exceed the threshold volume of livestock sales, above which they risk impairing their main livelihood.
- With the absence of animal herds (which are still ensconced in seasonal grazing areas in the southern part of the country and Mali) limiting income from pastoral activities, the only remaining option for poor households is to resort to earlier than usual mass short-term seasonal labor migration.
- Yields of flood recession crops, however poor they may be, should help improve household food consumption and ease pressure on remaining livelihoods between February and March 2015.

Most likely food security outcome

Household members remaining in this livelihood zone faced with food consumption gaps will be forced to make more radical changes to their diets (by eating more wheat and less sorghum and rice, which are unaffordable with their low seasonal incomes), limit their food intake, and resort to borrowing. Households still able to sell livestock could benefit from the favorable conditions engendered by the approaching holiday season between October and January, though competition from pastoralists in the east is expected to limit any such positive effects.

Poor households in this livelihood zone will face large shortfalls in their rainfed crop production and, thus, will remain market-dependent. This will force them to ramp up sales to boost their sharply reduced incomes as a result of the small areas planted in rainfed crops. Their longer than usual market dependence is making it hard for them to meet their essential nonfood expenses, leading to **Stressed (IPC Phase 2) conditions**. By March 2015, poor households could have difficulty meeting their food needs, which would put them in **Crisis (IPC Phase 3)**.

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 in line with the deterioration in terms of trade in the face of the high likelihood of a seasonal decline in livestock prices
	Long-term disruption of cross-border trade	Steady rise in coarse grain prices, driving up the prices of substitute cereals (wheat and rice)
	Locust infestation	Losses of crops, pastures, and wild plant products
	Suspension of assistance programs	High likelihood of a rise in food prices, sharply curtailing the food access of poor households
Agropastoral Zone	Restrictions on long-term migration by transhumant livestock	Massive losses of animals, sharply degrading livelihoods and reducing food production, and below-average incomes
	Additional assistance programs for poor households	Improvement in food availability for poor households and less pressure on their livestock herds
Senegal River Valley Zone	Failure of flood recession crops due to damage caused by wandering animals and stalk borers	Crop losses and increased reliance on commercially marketed foodstuffs
	Failure of irrigated crops	Heightened dependence on local markets Sharper decline in seasonal income and in-kind wages for related work
	Growing volume of Senegalese exports of (local and imported) rice and coarse grains	Better market cereal supplies, 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, translating into better cereal availability and higher household incomes compared with income figures for October.

About Scenario Development

To project food security outcomes, 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 arrive at a most likely scenario for the coming six months. Learn more here.