

MAURITANIA Food Security Alert

November 4, 2011

Above-average needs for emergency food assistance in 2012

Rainfall in 2011 was below average in Mauritania, unevenly distributed in time and space, and short-lived. As a result, agricultural and pastoral production will be below average, especially in the rainfed agriculture and agropastoral zones (Figure 1). Grain prices will also be above average. Low coping capacity will result in progressively worsening livelihood protection deficits, especially as of January, and survival deficits as of March/April. The need for emergency food assistance in 2012 will be significantly higher than the 2006-2011 average (~600,000 people in January), especially during the lean season between March/April and August/September.

In the rainfed farming and agropastoral livelihood zones, poor households—about 60 percent of the population—depend heavily on local agricultural production for food and income. Consumption of own production constitutes roughly 25 percent of annual food sources, mainly between September and December; an additional 5-10 percent comes from food loans typically repaid with own production. Agricultural production also offers more than a third of annual income through the sale of crops (20 percent of annual income, October/November) or through part of the sale of local wage labor (15-20 percent of annual income, September/October). Discussions with producers and technicians in the field indicate that the rainfed area planted and yields are below average. The production of rainfed millet, sorghum, and cowpea in these areas will be roughly 40-60 percent of average.

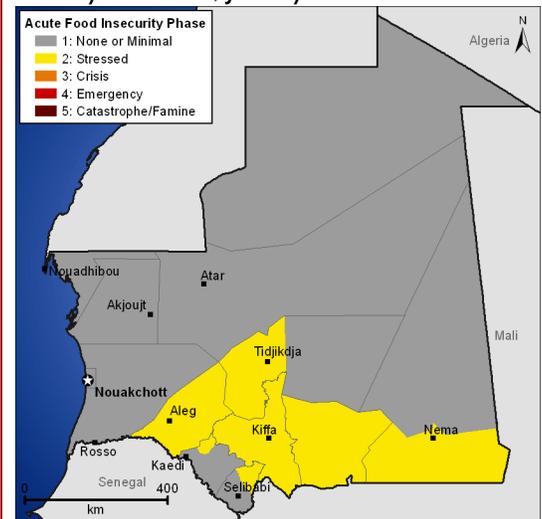
Poor households will increase market purchases in response. In an average year, the poor purchase 30-40 percent of their annual food consumption, mainly between March/April and August. This year purchases will constitute 45-60 percent of annual food sources. Imported cereals, such as rice, wheat, and sorghum from Mali, comprise the bulk of the cereals consumed in the country. Mauritania will be strongly affected by the rising price of rice on world markets and high prices due to low production of sorghum and millet in the surrounding areas of Mali and Senegal. FEWS NET assumes that average grain prices throughout the consumption year will be approximately 25 percent above the nominal five-year average. The share of household income spent on food would need to roughly double to fill the estimated gap.

An intensification of labor migration to urban centers and Mali has been underway since October, two to three months earlier than usual, and among more people than usual. This should result in an increase in total annual revenue of up to 60 percent. It is unlikely that other sources of income for poor households will be able to increase significantly, and there are no other positive coping strategies sufficient to meet the losses. As such, livelihood protection deficits are likely beginning between now and January, and food deficits are likely between March/April and August/September. The proportion of the population with poor consumption scores and, by corollary, the prevalence of global acute malnutrition will generally be higher than levels in July 2009-2011 (when GAM was above the WHO's emergency threshold of 15 percent) and will increase faster than usual in the first half of 2012.

Emergency food assistance needs will peak between March/April and August/September. FEWS NET expects that the emergency food assistance delivered by the government and partners in 2011/12 will be above average. The current analysis indicates that the severity of acute food insecurity will not exceed Crisis levels (IPC Phase 3) during the 2011/12 consumption year. FEWS NET will continue close monitoring of prices, labor migration, and the implementation of humanitarian assistance.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Figure 1. Map of projected most-likely food security outcomes, January – March 2012



Source : FEWS NET