MAURITANIA Executive Brief

February 28, 2011

Key Messages

- Food availability throughout Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal is above average. Moreover, demand for agricultural labor, a key source of income for the poorest households, has been average to above average, and prices for coarse grains are below last year's prices in most southern rural markets. Food access is currently the best in five years.
- In isolated areas that are or may be significantly affected by poor local production, Rift Valley Fever, or crop damage from desert locusts, low demand for labor in rural and urban areas is the primary obstacle limiting household capacity to cope and ensure minimum food access, particularly through the start of rain-fed planting in July.

Rising prices for basic foodstuffs

Mauritania depends on imports for approximately two-thirds of its national cereal consumption, particularly wheat and rice; hence Mauritania is highly vulnerable to price changes for these commodities. Despite record world wheat production in 2010/11 and wheat stocks from the previous year sufficient to fill any gap between production and consumption caused by production shortfalls in Europe, international wheat prices are high. FEWS NET expects these prices to remain high and possibly increase further until the prospects for the next harvests in North America, Europe, and the CIS region become clear (approximately May/June 2011). World rice production this year is high, and exports are likely to increase. International rice prices are expected to remain stable, though at relatively high levels compared to last year.

In response to high price levels for imported wheat, rice, sugar, and oil, the government has implemented "Opération Solidarité" whereby six hundred shops, 250 of which are located in Nouakchott, will sell a one-day family ration of imported rice or wheat, sugar, and oil at prices approximately 30 percent below market prices through June 2011. Stocks per shop are sufficient for 200 families. Though the program may be helpful in Nouakchott, the small size of the ration, the few number of families to be served, the distance of boutiques from rural populations in need of food access assistance, and the planned termination of the program prior to the peak of the agricultural lean season in August/September will dilute the impact of this program in interior markets.

In rural areas of the south, where the majority of the rural population resides, imported wheat and rice are substitutes for sorghum or millet. Given excellent production of coarse grains in the region, prices are significantly lower than those of last year (Table 1). Prices for coarse grains in Mauritania are expected to increase normally between now and the peak of the lean season in August without major price spikes. Therefore, even without the government's subsidy program, food access in Mauritania is expected to remain better than last year.

Table 1. Nominal prices of sorghum in MRO/kg observed during annual market assessment field visits to major reference markets.

Markets	January 2010	February 2011
Kiffa	170	140
Kankossa	150	120
Sélibaby	100	90
Kaedi	175	150

Source: FEWS NET

Rift Valley Fever outbreak

An outbreak of Rift Valley Fever (RVF) affected livestock primarily in the mixed oasis and pastoralism with wadi cultivation livelihood zone in the *moughataa* of Atar, d'Aoujeft, and Chinguitti in October and November 2010. The government confirms that the outbreak is now under control; they have completed a one-time distribution of milk and pulses to affected areas. However, the outbreak led to significant livestock miscarriages (up to 70 percent), high animal mortality (up to 20 percent), and reduced demand for meat and milk from affected areas. These losses are assumed to be evenly distributed among households as there are no reports of individual households having lost the majority of their herds.

FEWS NET expects the greatest impact of this epizootic will be significant reduction (as much as 60-70% in localized areas) in food and income from milk and meat and the demand for livestock (Figure 1). Better-off households have sufficient assets and diversified livelihood strategies to cope with this shock sustainably and purchase alternative foods. The majority of losses to households can be compensated without food deficits by increased purchases, financed by above-average

FEWS NET Washington
1717 H St NW
Washington DC 20006
info@fews.net

FEWS NET is a USAID-funded activity. The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

income from the sale of agricultural labor (normally up to 50 percent of annual income) and production (normally 30 percent of annual income) between January-March (lowlands) and July/August (dates). This is because the flooding that led to the RVF outbreak has offered exceptional opportunities in agriculture. Middle-income households (25 percent of the population) do not engage in lowland agriculture. They may employ negative coping strategies to purchase food until July/August, when relatively high income from date sales will enable them to restore their livelihoods.

Figure 1. Relative importance of animals and animal by-products to pastoral livelihoods in the mixed oasis and pastoralism with wadi cultivation livelihood zone

	Poor	Middle	Better-off
Share of milk and meat as food sources	5%	15%	45%
Share of animal and animal product sales as income sources	15%	15%	55%

Source: FEWS NET

Desert locusts

The FAO cites a moderate risk that adults and some adult groups will move north to the spring breeding areas along the southern side of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and Algeria in the next month or so, but it does not cite any current threat to critical crops or pastures. No reports of unusual locust-related damages to crops or pastures have reached FEWS NET. The Mauritanian government asserts that outbreaks in Mauritania are under control, and control capacity in Morocco is excellent. There is no need for locust-related food assistance allocations at this time. However, the Mauritanian agency responsible for locust control had exhausted 50% of its control resources by the end of January. Additional information is needed to determine whether or not additional control resources are needed.

Malnutrition

The prevalence of global acute malnutrition observed in January 2011 has declined since July 2010 in the center, south, and in Nouakchott. This trend matches expectations of seasonal variation in malnutrition between the peak rain-fed agricultural lean season (August), also the peak for water-borne illnesses, and the post-harvest period (January). Also of note, the Rift Valley Fever outbreak has not yet had a significant impact on the prevalence of malnutrition in the North.

Figure 1. Comparison of global acute malnutrition rates (GAM) in Mauritania

2009 Survey areas	2010, 2011 Survey areas	SMART-Jul 2009		SMART-Jul 2010		SMART-Jan 2011	Implied change in prevalence, Jul '10 - Jan '11
		GAM	95 % CI	GAM	95 % CI	GAM	
Southeast	Hodh Chargui	12.5 %	8.8-17.5%	11.4 %	8.4 – 15.3%	10.6%	=
	Hodh Gharbi			13.9 %	11.2 – 17.1%	4.4%	▼
Center	Assaba	19.2 %	14.6-25.1%	9.9 %	7.1 – 13.6%	4.0%	↓
	Brakna			18.4 %	14.0 – 23.9%	9.2%	▼
	Tagant			14.1 %	11.0 – 18.0%	9.4%	↓
South	Guidimakha	16.8 %	13.7-20.4%	19.8 %	17.2 – 22.7%	4.0%	▼
	Gorgol			19.9 %	16.8 – 23.5%	6.6%	▼
Nouakchott	Nouakchott	7.9 %	5.4-11.3%	9.6 %	7.2 – 12.7%	2.0%	▼
North	Adrar, Inchiri, Tiris	7.3 %	4.7-11.2%	4.5 %	2.9 – 7.0%	7.5%	=
	Nouadhibou			4.6 %	2.9 – 7.2%	13.2%	▲
Trarza	Trarza	6.4 %	4.6-8.9%	8.4 %	5.6 – 12.4%	5.2%	=
= implies stability ↓ implies possible improvement;				▼ implies a likely statistically significant improvement ▲ implies a likely statistically significant deterioration			

Source malnutrition data: UNICEF, table: FEWS NET

Further investigation is needed into the changes in observed prevalence of malnutrition in several areas. In the southeast, malnutrition rates in January similar to those in July may be a sign of above-average food insecurity, possibly related to market anomalies due to civil insecurity or poor local production. There are also anecdotal reports that unemployment may have been high in Nouadhibou in September/October, but it was unclear at the time to what extent this was part of the normal, August-October commercial fishing ban. If unemployment remains unseasonably widespread, this, combined with rising food prices, could be driving decreases in food access and increasing malnutrition. Trends in malnutrition prevalence between July and January may also be related to normal seasonal food access issues in areas where households are more dependent on off-season (January-March) production than main season production.