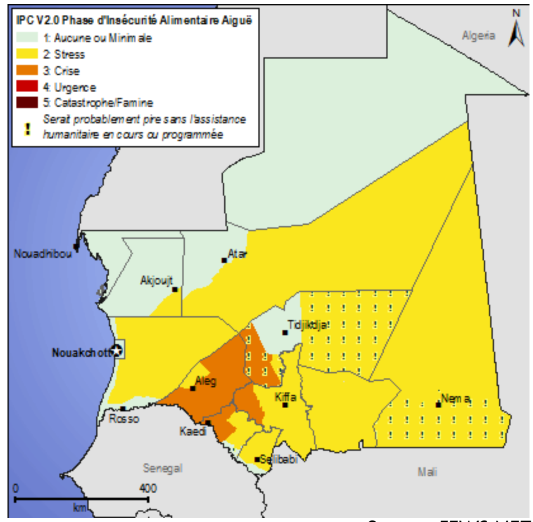
MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook July through December 2015

Food consumption gaps for poor households in central and southern areas

KEY MESSAGES

Current food security outcomes, July 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.

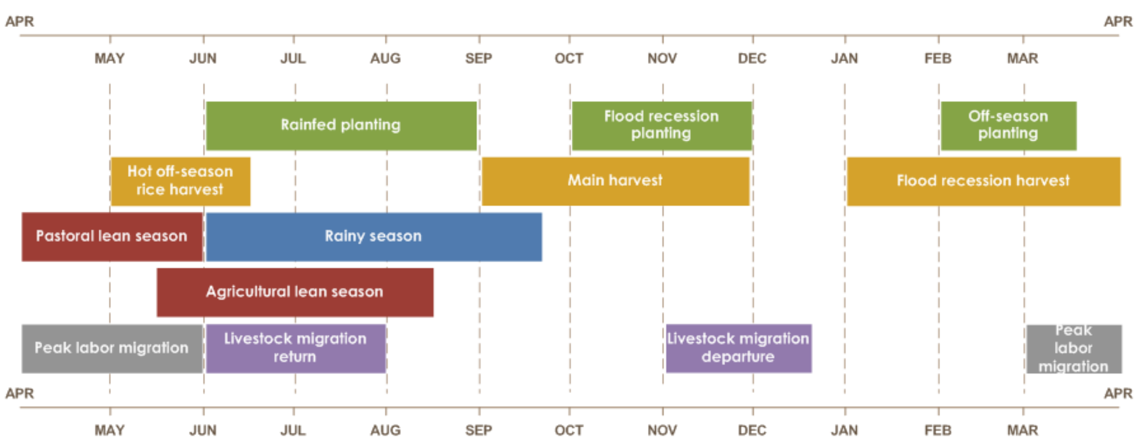
- The lack of household food stocks, sharp reduction in seasonal income, and inadequacy of food assistance programs will expose poor households in central and southern areas of the country to Crisis (IPC Phase 3 and 3!) levels of food insecurity between July and September.

- While better pastoral conditions and crop production are expected to improve their food access in the next few months, poor households residing in the areas mentioned above will still face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food insecurity between October and December. The repayment of debts, depletion of livestock herds, and end of humanitarian assistance programs will limit the impact of seasonal gains during that period, helping to drive elevated levels of food insecurity.

- Unlike in urban areas, prices for livestock in rural areas are down sharply since June. The poor pastoral conditions triggered atypically large animal sales, which was further exacerbated by the practices of livestock traders. Consequently, poor pastoral households currently facing livelihood protection deficits will continue to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food insecurity through September.

- Due to average seasonal rainfall forecasts, pastoral conditions and rainfed crop harvests are expected to be favorable between October and December. As a result, food security outcomes for poor households in areas currently facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food insecurity will improve to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) levels.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

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NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Current situation

Farming: Despite reported rainfall activity, the only rainfed farming activities underway are in the southern reaches of the rainfed farming zone (along the Malian border), with farmers preferring to wait for the departure of transhumant herds and see the results of their dry-planting efforts before engaging in any wet-planting activities.

The FAO and the Mauritanian government have distributed 479 metric tons of cereal seeds to 8050 households across the country. The growing season for irrigated rainy season crops in the Senegal River Valley is underway but, with the limited access to farm credit on account of the nonpayment of water charges from 2014, there are much smaller areas currently planted in crops compared with the same time in 2014.

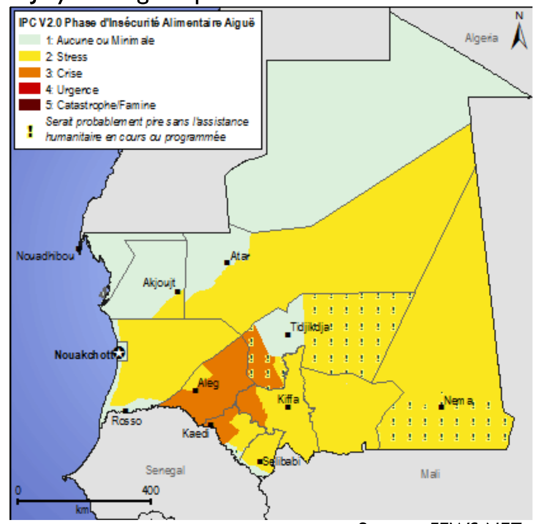
The date harvest in oasis areas is in progress. Though date production is down from 2014 and below-average, households are already generating larger seasonal incomes from these crops than at the same time in 2014 due to the sharp rise in the price of dates (with high-quality varieties selling for 1200 to 1500 MRO/kg, compared with 800 to 1200 MRO in 2014), fueled by the heightened demand during Ramadan.

As usual, there are no farming activities underway at this time in other livelihood zones.

Pastoral conditions: Seasonal pastoral conditions in most areas of the country are poor and the only pastures still meeting the needs of existing livestock herds are in the north, where the average levels of rainfall in 2014 produced only enough new usable pasture growth for camel herds able to go several days without water. While it normally meets year-round livestock needs, the deterioration in the condition of pastures in areas along the Malian border with the largest concentrations of transhumant Mauritanian livestock herds is so severe that pastoralists are resorting to the use of animal feed and sorghum crops from Mali to feed their cattle and sheep. Even with the pastoral assistance program centered around the sale of 30,296 metric tons of animal feed at subsidized prices (3500 MRO for a 50 kg bag of feed) to a target group of approximately 117,220 pastoralists, prices on formal markets have been steadily rising since April, though at a somewhat slower rate since the start-up of this program in May. Current prices for animal feed are between 7000 and 9000 MRO compared with 3800 to 6000 MRO at the same time in 2014.

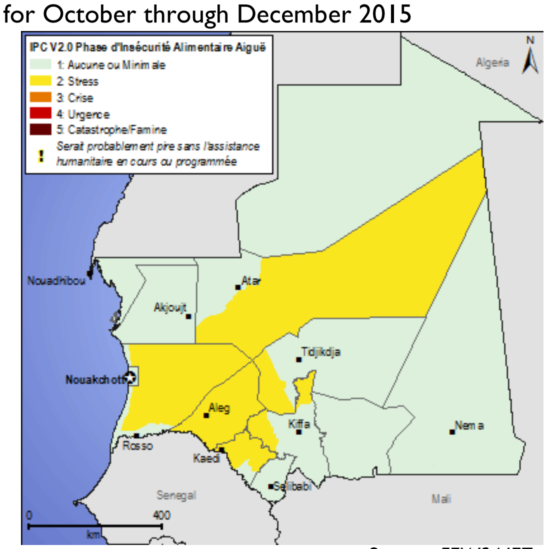
With the shortage of pastures and their inability to afford animal feed to maintain their animals, poor and lower middle-income pastoralists are continuing to sell livestock to traveling livestock traders offering low prices, which they are forced to accept on account of their distance from retail markets (except for those in the southern reaches of the rainfed farming zone). Thus, a sheep for sale on the Ould Yengé market in a rural pastoral area in northern Guidimakha is currently worth only 14,000 MRO, compared with its normal value of around 20,000 MRO at the same time in an average year.

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for July through September 2015



Source: *FEWS NET*

Most likely estimated food security outcomes for October through December 2015

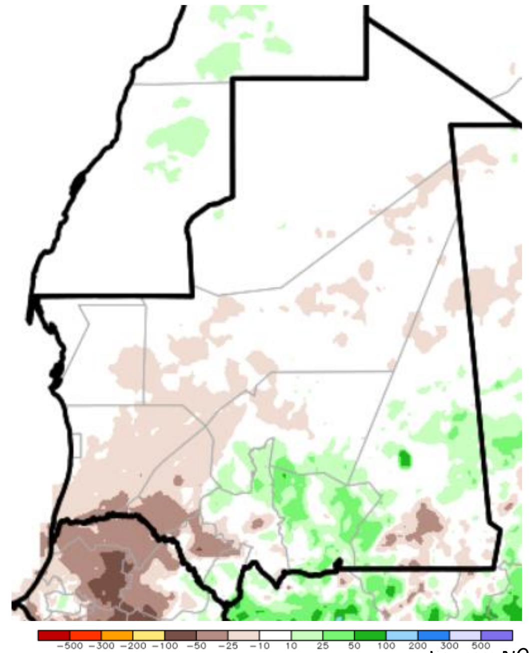


Source: *FEWS NET*

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

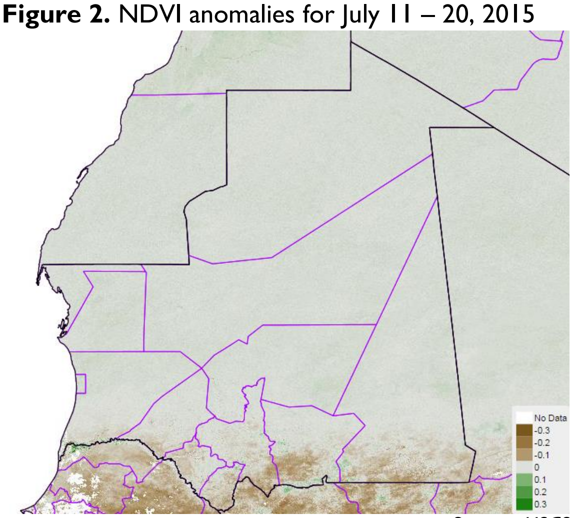
Seasonal income: The lack of local seasonal activities in the southwestern reaches of the Senegal River Valley (where rainfed farming activities have not yet started up) is limiting incomes in that area. The only currently active sources of seasonal income in many livelihood zones are livestock sales (by households with remaining animals) and migrant remittances from short-term seasonal labor migration. However, migrant remittances are only about 25 to 30 percent of average this year as the atypically large number of migrant workers has heightened competition for the limited number of employment opportunities. However, in some municipalities, limited household income levels are being bolstered by monthly cash transfer payments by the WFP and certain NGOs (Save the Children, OXFAM, ACCORD, etc.) to 69,700 and 92,334 households, respectively. These payments are spread over three to four months and range from 15,000 to 22,000 MRO, except in areas also targeted for distributions of free food assistance, where transfers are reduced to 12,000 MRO.

Figure 1. Estimated cumulative rainfall anomalies (RFE) for the period from June 1st through July 28, 2015, in mm



Source: *NOAA*

Figure 2. NDVI anomalies for July 11 – 20, 2015



Source: *USGS*

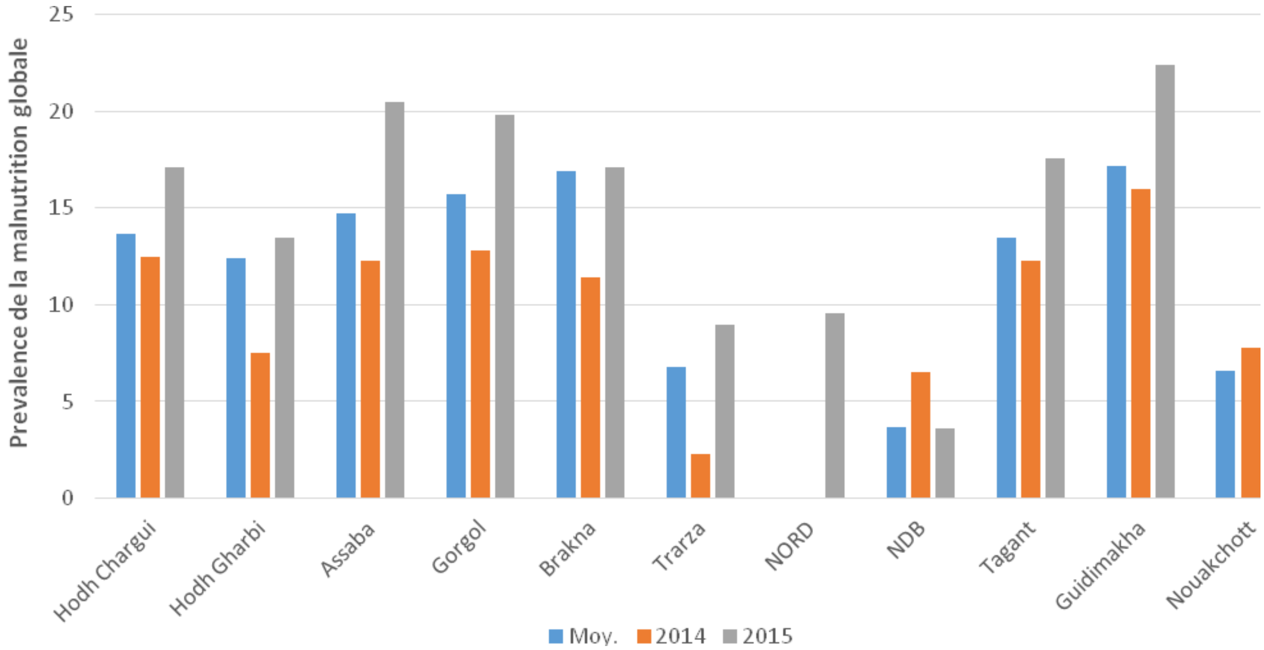
Markets and prices: Retail markets are still well-stocked with imported staple foodstuffs. Unit prices for wheat, the main imported substitute cereal, range from 125 to 170 MRO/kg, depending on the area and have been stable for the last three months. In addition, wheat prices are slightly below the five-year average, except in the agropastoral zone where ongoing social reforms have heightened demand for wheat, which is easier for women to prepare than sorghum.

Nutritional situation: UNICEF and the Ministry of Health conducted a SMART nutrition survey of 12,736 children between six and 59 months of age in all parts of the country over the period of June 4th to June 26, 2015. According to the preliminary survey findings, 14 percent [13.0 – 15.0] of this group of children between the ages of six and 59 months were suffering from global acute malnutrition (GAM), indicating a rise in the prevalence of GAM compared to both last year's lean season (9.8 percent) and the lean seasons of the past five years (between 9.8 and 13.1 percent). This also exceeds WHO's critical GAM threshold of 10 percent.

A breakdown by region shows six regions (Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Tagant, and Guidimakha) with GAM rates above WHO's 15 percent emergency threshold and 3.4 to 5.8 percentage points above the five-year average. The crude mortality rate for children under five ranged from 0.17 [0.06 – 0.54] per 10,000 population per day in Tagant to 0.67 [0.48 – 0.94] per 10,000 population per day in Hodh Chargui. Only in the Guidimakha region was the GAM rate above the emergency threshold during last year's lean season. Given the economic conditions in this zone with 2014/15 crop production approximately 10 percent above the five-year average and up from the previous year by 101 percent, and favorable food access marked by relatively stable prices since 2014 and good supply levels of both locally produced crops and imports from Mali, the causes of this poor nutritional situation would appear to lie in other areas (such as health, water supply and water quality, education, sociological factors, etc.)

The departmental breakdown shows rather troubling rates of global acute malnutrition in Amourj and Kankossa in June which, according to preliminary figures, exceeded 20 percent and were well above figures for 2013, the only recent year for which there is SMART survey data available. The mortality rate for children under five was not especially high in Kankossa, but was estimated at 1.04 [0.73 to 1.47] in Amourj, compared with 0.13 [0.02 to 0.99] back in 2013.

Figure 3. Prevalence of global acute malnutrition (z-score of <-2 and/or edema) in June 2015 compared with the same time last year and the five-year average for the same time of year – preliminary findings



Source: *UNICEF, Ministry of Health*

Food assistance: According to the general response plan as of April 27, 2015, 524,165 people are targeted by 2015 food assistance programs (cash transfer programs or distributions of food rations) mounted by the CSA (the national Food Security Agency), WFP, FAO, and various NGOs (Oxfam, Action Against Hunger-Spain, Save the Children, GRET, IOM, and ACCORD). These programs will improve food access for program recipients in service areas in Assaba, Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimagha, Hodh Echarghi, Hodh El Gharby, and Tagant.

Assumptions

The most likely national food security scenario for the period from July through December 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

Farming activities:

- **Rainfall:** There are conflicting seasonal forecasts for the period from July through September, with some forecasts (by NOAA and PRESAO/ACMAD) predicting average to above-average conditions while others show a higher probability of below-average rainfall (forecasts by the ECMWF, IRI, and UK MET). In view of this uncertainty, FEWS NET is assuming that most farming areas of the country will get average levels of rainfall between July and October and will have a normal end-of-season in October.
- **Crop production:** After two consecutive years of low rainfall, there are above-average numbers of workers engaged in short-term seasonal labor migration. There is a high likelihood of large cutbacks in the land area planted in crops on account of the reduced presence of farm labor (with migrant workers still in destination areas waiting for the start of the rainy season to return to the land), problems with access to credit, and the heavy pressure from transhumant livestock on croplands that also serve as pasture. Long-cycle crops will be ready for harvesting starting in October.
- **Date production:** Though there will be a smaller than average volume of date production in northern (Adrar) and central areas of the country (Tagant, Assaba, and Hodh El Gharbi) on account of water shortages, it will generate a

larger stream of income between June and August (from sales of fresh dates) and after September (from sales of dried dates) than in 2014 due to the sharp increase in producer prices for dates (to between 1200 and 1500 MRO/kg).

- **Farm income:** The outlook for an average rainy season points to near-average to slightly above-average levels of farm income in most farming areas. However, the likely downsizing of cropped areas in irrigated farming schemes will likely reduce income from these activities.

Pastoral activities:

- **Pastoral conditions:** Conditions did not start to improve until the definitive start of the rainy season (in mid-July) and will not reach optimal levels until August, assuming there are no protracted dry spells. The new green pastures, however dense or sparse they may be, will help limit the use of animal feed by pastoralists and curb livestock sales as part of coping strategies between July and December. They will improve the physical condition of livestock, helping to drive up their prices and strengthen their reproductive capacity. The next round of new births and main milk production period will begin six to seven months from the sprouting of solid new pasture growth, or after the end of December.
- **Wage income from pastoral work:** As usual, the improvement in pastoral conditions with the beginning of the new rainy season will limit the use of pastoral labor and reduce the amount of income from this type of work in all pastoral areas between August and December.

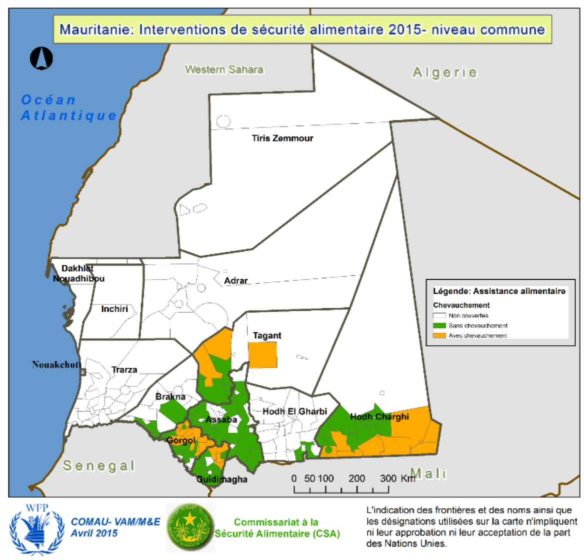
Markets:

- **Food imports:** There will be regular adequate imports of different foodstuffs (rice, wheat, sugar, oil, etc.) during the outlook period to meet domestic consumption needs and for re-export to Senegal, Mali, and the southern Maghreb, where the sale of these commodities and of manufactured goods serves as a source of foreign exchange.
- **Livestock markets:** There will be low supplies of animals on livestock markets in pastoral areas in the central, western, and northern reaches of the country due to transhumant herd movements and the depletion of sedentary animal herds (a large part of which were sold off to meet the food needs of households and livestock or decimated by food shortages). Supplies will become increasingly tight with the gradual onset of the rainy season, spurring the growth of new green pasture and allaying the fears of pastoralists. The situation in all pastoral areas other than in the rainfed farming zone, where the condition of pastures is still more or less acceptable and where there should be more or less normal reproductive cycles, will be typical of any post-crisis period in rural areas when, after losing a large part of their herds, pastoralists stop selling animals in hopes of rebuilding their herds through new births.
- **Wild plant products**: With the start of the rainy season in July, wild plant foods (mainly leaves) will be present at local markets by the third dekad of that month, helping to reduce demand for other imported foodstuffs (milk, pasta, etc.) Between October and December, the spin-offs from an average rainy season should translate into average yields of edible wild fruits and seeds, helping to bolster the incomes of poor households gathering these wild plant products with a view to selling them on local markets or to collectors for shipment to Nouakchott and export.
- **Cereal prices:** Unlike the case in an average year, when the tightening of supplies will normally drive sorghum prices steadily upwards throughout the lean season (between May and August), there should not be any steep increases in prices this year on account of low demand, with households turning to less expensive foods (such as wheat) and ongoing humanitarian assistance programs. The downward trend in prices since March should continue and, barring a disruption in assistance programs or shock to world market prices for wheat or wheat supply chains, prices for this commodity should remain stable through September, at which point they should begin to decline with the expected average yields of rainfed cereal crops (particularly sorghum). Prices for imported foodstuffs (rice, wheat, and processed food products such as oil and sugar) will rise in line with normal seasonal trends, though any price increases will be limited by the good availability of substitute cereals (wheat, locally grown rice, and maize from large re-exports by Mali, Senegal, etc.).
- **Livestock prices:** There will sharp increases in average market prices for livestock in local seats of government compared with June levels, fueled by demand for two consecutive religious celebrations (Ramadan in July and Tabaski in October) and the tightening of supplies with the beginning of the rainy season. Price increases will be smaller in rural areas, where pastoralists will remain subject to the dictates of traveling traders.

Other major food security drivers:

- **Migrant remittances:** Once the rainy season settles in, migrant workers will return home to work the land in August. The lack of jobs in destination areas for migrant workers will accelerate the flow of return migration, which is generally spread out over time according to the pattern of rainfall. This is expected to accentuate the reduction in migration income even more than usual, which is currently already at less than 25 percent of the average.
- **Debt:** The current above-average levels of debt, driven by low seasonal incomes and the heightened dependence on food purchases, will remain unchanged until the upcoming September harvest. This will affect future income from farm labor (as well as income from short-term seasonal labor migration and humanitarian assistance programs), which will be used to pay off debts between July and September. Normally, these debts are repaid from crop yields between November and December, after the harvest of higher-yielding long-cycle crops. However, when very large debts are incurred, as is the case this year, traders require partial payments from harvests of short-cycle crops. Thus, a good portion of the short-cycle crops scheduled to be harvested at the end of September will be used to pay off debts.
- **Assistance programs:** There are several assistance programs (distributions of food rations and cash transfer programs) mounted by the government, the WFP, and NGOs scheduled to run through at least the month of September in the areas of intervention shown in Figure 4. In addition, based on figures for the target population in the response plan released in April 2015, FEWS NET is assuming that at least 50 percent of very poor and poor households in Amourj, Bassikounou, Djigueni, M'Bout, Monguel, Moudjeria, Nema, Tibedra, and Tichit departments will be served by humanitarian assistance programs meeting at least 20 percent of their energy needs. Ongoing programs in existence for several years such as village-level food security stocks (SAVS), government-subsidized *"boutiques de solidarité"* (BS), and outpatient therapeutic feeding centers (CRENAM) will continue through December. With the current level of information on departmental and municipal coverage rates for these assistance programs, it is difficult to determine their exact level of impact. While acknowledging that they do exist, it is safe to assume that they are still too limited and unevenly distributed in time and space to have any significant positive effect on prevailing food insecurity levels since the month of June, except in the specific areas referred to above.

Figure 4. Areas of interventions for 2015 humanitarian programs



Source: *CSA, WFP*

- **Community self-help:** This refers to local (with the extended family and village community) and outside ties of mutual assistance (with relatives in other livelihood zones or working in urban areas with more or less regular incomes). The current extremely active and above-average flow of both types of assistance is expected to continue until the upcoming main harvest season (between September and December). It is to this end that cash transfer payments and food rations furnished by assistance programs are also assumed to be shared by all poor households within the community.

Most likely food security outcomes

Between July and September 2015, poor households in Brakna, southwestern Tangant, western Assaba, and northern Gorgol with large shortfalls in their cereal production and annual 2014/15 incomes will try and cope by upping their consumption of less expensive foods sold in *"boutiques de solidarité"* at subsidized prices (wheat and locally grown rice), selling any remaining animals, skipping meals, and sharply cutting back their food intake. Their food consumption gaps will also be a factor in keeping global acute malnutrition rates close to or slightly above their June 2015 levels, which are well above GAM rates in previous years and WHO's 15 percent crisis threshold. While their food deficits will be more or less stabilized by ongoing distributions of free food assistance and cash transfer payments in certain areas, these households will still be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3 and 3!) through September 2015. In addition, there is a high probability of extremely large food consumption deficits, propelling certain very poor households (less than 20 percent of the population of affected areas) into an Emergency (IPC Phase 4) situation, if only between July and September.

These households will have to wait for pastoral conditions to improve and for new supplies of crops (edible leaves, short-cycle sorghum and cowpea crops, and, in particular, harvests of long-cycle crops generally beginning in October) for any hope of even partially covering their current food consumption deficits. However, this improvement could be slowed by the adverse effects of certain negating factors (such as the repayment of debts, the depletion of livestock herds, the suspension of assistance programs as of the end of September, etc.) While global acute malnutrition rates will likely come down and there will be an improvement in current food security outcomes, households will continue to have difficulty meeting their basic nonfood expenses and, thus, will face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions through December.

All groups of pastoral and agropastoral households currently in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity will eventually improve to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels between July and December with the help of humanitarian assistance (the pastoral assistance program, distributions of food rations, and cash transfer programs) and with improvements in pastoral conditions.

There will be no change in the currently Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food insecurity in certain predominantly pastoral livelihood zones between now and September, or until there are good pastoral conditions to bolster yields from rainfed crop production. As of October, food insecurity in these areas will gradually come down to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) levels with the positive effects of harvests of long-cycle crops in October/November, better pastoral conditions, and incomes from livestock-raising activities strengthened by the physical recovery of livestock and their resulting higher market value.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Central Senegal River Valley area (livelihood zone 08)

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, mainly *walo (*flood-recession) crops, and farm labor. To supplement their earnings from local employment during the growing season for rainy season irrigated crops (between June and October) and in farming activities for *walo (*flood-recession) crops, they migrate to neighboring regions (mainly in October and March) and urban areas (between April and June) in search of work, particularly after a poor season. Poor households in this area have had two consecutive years marred by large crop production deficits and poor pastoral conditions.

Current situation

Farming: The small-scale rainfed farming activities in the northern part of this livelihood zone basically revolve around the growing of melons and watermelons. Land preparation work is underway but, with the lack of any significant rainfall in this area, many local farmers faced with a shortage of seeds have not yet planted any crops.

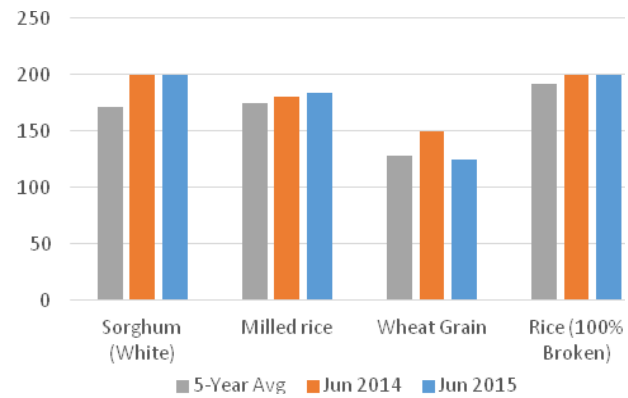
Irrigated farming activities are underway in the southern part of this livelihood zone. At this point in the season, the area planted in crops is smaller than in 2014 with certain communities still not able to gain access to farm credit on account of the nonpayment of previous water charges. Thus, there are mostly small cropped areas worked by household members, with the lack of large-scale private irrigation schemes limiting demand for labor.

Seasonal income: This year, the lack of *walo* production whose processing normally provides jobs for poor households in this livelihood zone has sharply reduced local seasonal incomes. The main currently active sources of seasonal income are sales of livestock (by households with any remaining animals) and migrant remittances from short-term seasonal labor migration, amounting to barely 25 to 30 percent of average earnings from this source. The only assistance program in this area is the cash transfer program mounted by OXFAM providing monthly transfer payments of 22,000 MRO through December 2015.

Markets and prices: Markets are well-stocked with imported foodstuffs (rice, oil, wheat, sugar, wheat flour, etc.) There has been a steady improvement in seasonal coarse grain supplies since April with the seasonal clearance sales by Malian farmers, but its impact on conditions in this area is less and less perceptible with most of these imported sorghum and maize crops purchased at the Malian border by transhumant pastoralists for use as animal feed. Imports from Senegal are basically limited to local and imported rice, the volume of which is down sharply on account of the high demand in the northern part of that country, which normally gets its supplies from near-by markets in Mauritania. On the other hand, fruit and vegetable imports from north Africa have picked up. For a long time, these products were found only in Nouakchott, but they are gradually making their way to rural markets, where they are providing increasing strong competition for Senegalese vegetables.

In Boghé, prices for sorghum, the main cereal crop grown and consumed by poor households, were stable between May and June, though June prices were 14 percent above the five-year average in certain parts of the area. The good regular supply of wheat in government-subsidized *"boutiques de solidarité"* is keeping prices for this commodity three percent below the five-year average. Thus, more and more poor households are turning to wheat, which is less expensive (around 125 MRO/kg) and readily available on local markets, and to locally grown rice from village-level irrigation schemes (whose price has been stable for the past several months).

Figure 5. Unit prices of major types of cereals on the Boghé market, compared with last year and the five-year average



Source: *FEWS NET*

Though still above the five-year average (by 13 percent), June prices for an average sheep were down by 14 percent from May 2015 and 17 percent from June 2014. Even with sorghum prices holding steady, this drop in the price of sheep still brought terms of trade down by 14 percent from May 2015 and 17 percent from June 2014, though they are still close to (two percent below) the five-year average. Terms of trade for sheep versus wheat are also down by 14 percent from May 2015 but more or less stable compared with June 2014.

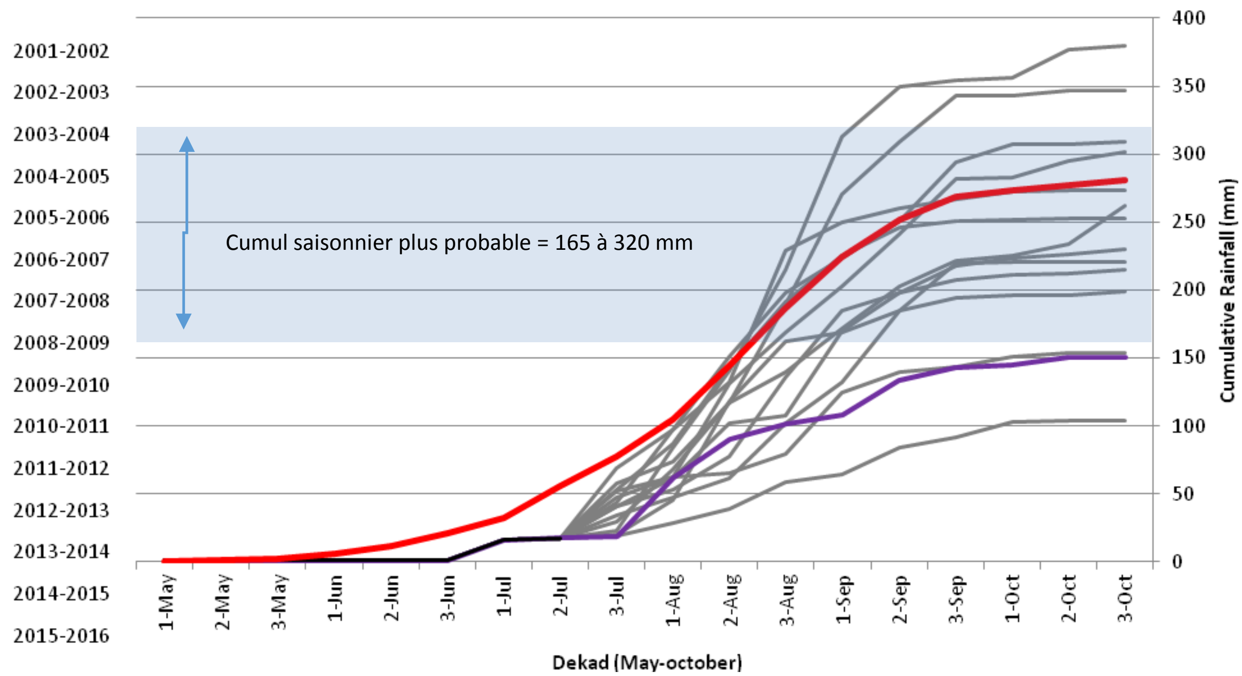
Nutritional situation: The findings by the SMART nutrition survey conducted in June 2015 put the global acute malnutrition rate at 19.9 percent [15.2 – 25.6] and the crude death rate for children under five at 0.22 [0.05 – 0.92, with a 95 percent confidence interval] in the cluster area (Boghé – Bababé - M'Bagne), which coincides with this area of concern. By way of comparison, the SMART survey conducted in July 2013, a year of production deficits but well-above-average levels of national production, which is the only other recent nutritional survey in these areas, put the prevalence of GAM at 24.1 percent [18.8 to 30.4] and the crude death rate for children under five at 0.11 [0.01 – 0.88].

Assumptions

The most likely local food security scenario for the period from July through December 2015 is based on the following general assumptions:

- **Rainy season:** Based on its assumption of average levels of cumulative rainfall for the country as a whole over the period from July through October and rainfall estimates to date, FEWS NET is assuming there will be continued normal rainfall activity for the rest of the rainy season, with a cumulative seasonal rainfall total of between 165 and 320 mm in M'Bagne. As usual, there will be large amounts of rain between the middle of July and the middle of September.

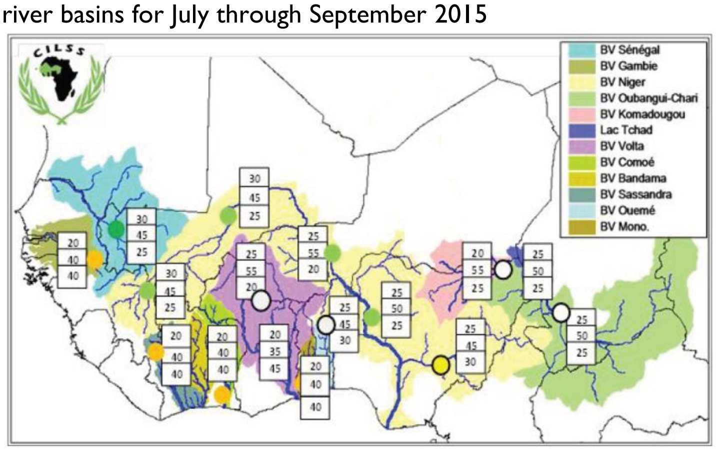
Figure 6. Breakdown of cumulative rainfall modeling results in M'Bagne based on rainfall levels to date, patterns of rainfall during recent years, and seasonal forecasts



Source: *FEWS NET*

- **Flood levels:** According to forecasts by AGRHYMET, there is a high likelihood of average to above-average water levels along the Senegal River (see Figure 7), creating favorable conditions for *walo* production as of October.

Figure 7. Probability of the most likely water levels in major river basins for July through September 2015



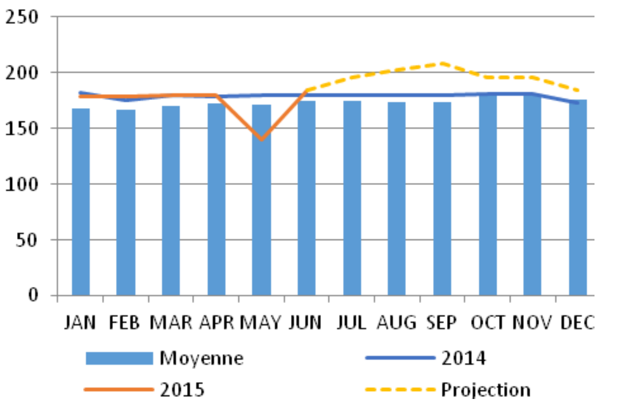
Source: *AGRHYMET Regional Center*

- **Crop production:** In line with the assumptions on rainfall conditions outlined above, there should be rainfed farming activities (for *diéri* crops) between August and October in the southern reaches of the agropastoral zone and the rainfed farming zone in the central and northern reaches of the country, in addition to cropping activities in village-level irrigation schemes in the south along the Senegal River. After surpassing the five-year average every year since 2013, the size of irrigated farming areas this year will be smaller than average. Many village irrigation schemes, particularly privately-operated schemes, with unpaid debts from 2014 will not be eligible for new loans and, thus, will not be able to plant as large an area in crops as in previous years. The next harvests are not expected until sometime between September and October and will be limited mainly to rainfed (*diéri*) watermelon crops and local varieties of irrigated rainy season rice crops. Crop yields from these harvests will most likely be under the five-year average and lower than in 2014, when government incentives (including the forgiveness of previous debts, easy access to credit, and free supplies of fertilizer) significantly boosted rice production.
- **Pastoral conditions:** Pastoral conditions did not start to improve until the third dekad of July and, with a shortened rainy season (from mid-July to the beginning of October), pastures could be sparser than usual. In any event, it will be

several months before the physical recovery of livestock (between August and November) and new animal births will have any major impact benefiting all household groups.

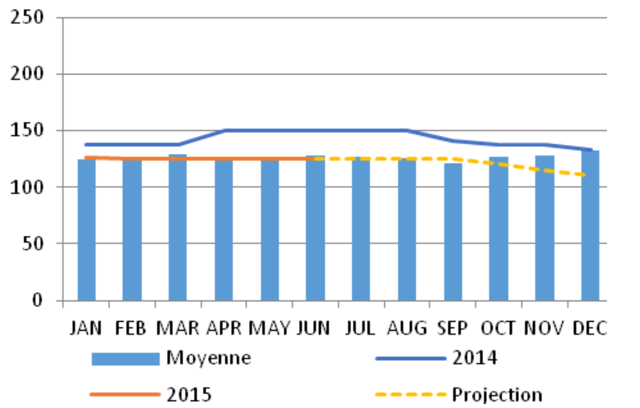
- **Income:** There will be relatively little fluctuation in wage rates for farm labor between July and October/November for harvests of rainfed crops and the growing of *walo* (flood-recession) crops, which currently range from 1000 to 1500 MRO/day, compared with an average of 1500 to 2000 MRO/day at the same time of year.
- **Markets and prices:** Markets will continue to be well-stocked with imported foodstuffs. Seasonal coarse grain supplies will be limited through August, followed by an improvement in supplies between September and December with the harvests of rainfed crops and flow of imports from Mali no longer being purchased by pastoralists with the availability of fresh pasture. Prices for coarse grains and locally grown rice will come down between September and December in line with seasonal trends during the post-harvest period. The downward trend in wheat prices since March should continue and, barring a disruption to assistance programs or shock to world market prices for wheat or wheat supply chains, prices should stabilize between now and September, followed by a new decline driven by the expected average or slightly below-average yields of rainfed cereal crops. Livestock prices will continue to fall until the growth of new usable pastures and will then increasing again between August and December due to a reduced number of animal sales.

Figure 8. Projected price of wheat on the Boghé market between July and December, in MRO/kg



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 9. Projected price of locally grown rice on the Boghé market between July and December, in MRO/kg



Source: *FEWS NET*

- **Nutritional situation:** Malnutrition rates are expected to climb through September, approaching 2011 levels, a year marked by well-below-average (-25 percent) *walo* and *dieri* crop production levels. They will come back down between October and December with yields from upcoming harvests (mainly of irrigated crops) and livestock-raising activities (with the improvement in pastoral conditions).

Most likely food security outcomes

Many households unusually highly dependent on market purchase and with below-average incomes are upping their consumption of less expensive foods (wheat and locally grown rice) and increasing their borrowing. However, even with these coping strategies, they will still face food consumption deficits and, thus, remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) between July and September. Between October and December, land preparation work for the planting of *walo* crops serving as a potential source of extra income and small food supplies from harvests of irrigated crops will help improve their food access and limit their recourse to negative coping strategies (such as skipping meals and sharply cutting their size). However, they will continue to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions until the next round of harvests of flood-recession sorghum (*walo*) crops in February/March 2016

Northwestern agropastoral zone (livelihood zone 07)

The area of concern within this livelihood zone includes northern Gorgol (Monguel department), northern Brakna (Magta Lahjar and Aleg departments), western Assaba (the western part of Barkéol department), and southern Tagant (the southern reaches of Moudjéria department). The main occupations for 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 and the sale of animals.

Current situation

Rainfall conditions: There has been some light rainfall activity in the eastern and central reaches of the agropastoral zone but, so far, the northwestern reaches of this area have not gotten any rain while, normally, the rainy season gets underway no later than mid-July.

Farming conditions: As usual, the entire area is in the middle of the slack season. There are no local farming activities to serve as a source of crop production and/or local income-generation. The small viable areas for the growing of rainfed crops do not require any preparatory work before the beginning of the rains.

Pastoral conditions: Pastoral conditions are severely degraded and no longer meet the current needs of local livestock. Households have been without milk for several months on account of the earlier than usual departure of transhumant livestock herds (six months before their normal departure date in March/April). Those with the means to do so are buying supplies of powdered milk at prices ranging from 1800 to 2000 MRO/kg in rural areas, depending on their accessibility, compared with a five-year average of 1500 MRO. With the lack of pasture, households with sedentary animals are completely dependent on animal feed. Even with the start-up of the government's pastoral assistance program, market prices for animal feed are still fairly high and are steadily rising. While the standard price of a bag of animal feed is 3500 MRO in all parts of the country, animal feed imported from Mali is selling for anywhere from 6500 MRO/bag in areas along the Malian border (on the Amourj, Adel Bagrou, Djiguenni, and Modibougou markets, compared with a five-year seasonal average of 4500 MRO), to 7000 MRO/bag in central areas of the country (Tintane, Kiffa, and Kankossa, compared with a five-year seasonal average of 5000 MRO), to as much as 8000 MRO/bag in the northwestern reaches of the agropastoral zone (on the Magta Lahjar, Aleg, and Monguel markets, compared with a five-year seasonal average of 5500 MRO)

Access to water: There have been problems with access to a safe water supply for human consumption for the past several months in certain parts of Aftout (in the southern reaches of Moudjéria department and the eastern part of Monguel department) which, while clearly seasonal, are more severe than usual this year.

Cereal availability in households and on markets: As usual, while poor households in the central and eastern reaches of the agropastoral zone still had available food stocks in June, those in the northwest have had no food stocks since 2013 and are basically market-dependent or dependent on seasonal coarse grain supplies which, while improving, are still well below-average. However, markets are well-stocked with imported foods and are able to adequately meet local demand and needs for the proper functioning of domestic and cross-border trade networks. The government-operated *"boutiques de solidarité"* are also still regularly stocked with adequate supplies of foodstuffs, which they are continuing to sell at subsidized prices (30 40 percent below formal market prices). Current prices for sorghum on the Magta Lahjar market, the main market in this area, are down by five percent from May 2015 but 14 percent above the five-year average (2010-2014) due to the demand for seeds.

Livestock markets: Contrary to nationwide trends, livestock markets in this area are still well-stocked with animals despite the departure of transhumant livestock and sharp reduction in herd size with the massive sales of animals since 2014. While prices for animals in local seats of government are up slightly, livestock prices in rural areas are still steadily falling. The price of an average sheep in the area encompassing southern Magta Lahjar department, southern Aleg department, northern Boghé department, and northwestern Bababé department fell more than 45 percent between April and June from an average of 22,000 MRO down to 12,000 MRO. Poor populations in this area are reduced to selling more and more female animals to meet the foods needs of their households and livestock, which they had been holding onto in hopes of being able to build up a new small herd with the expected improvement in pastoral conditions as of July.

Seasonal income: Poor households have 50 to 70 percent below-average annual incomes. This is attributable to the combined effects of the limited supply of local work, which is highly contingent on farming and pastoral conditions and the sharp decline in earnings from short-term seasonal labor migration with migrant workers having difficulty finding jobs in their destination areas and the added burden on them from newcomers to the area. The only currently active sources of seasonal income are sales of livestock (by households with any remaining animals) and migrant remittances from short-term seasonal labor migration, amounting to barely 25 to 30 percent of average earnings with the atypically large numbers of migrant workers heightening competition for the limited available employment opportunities. Ramped-up informal local activities (such as sales of wood, charcoal, and straw) are not generating any more income than usual with the smaller volume of sales per household at lower prices. For example, up until April, a wood vendor could sell three carts of wood during the course of a month for 6000 MRO per load (generating a monthly income of 18,000 MRO). By June, with the growing number of vendors and long distances to wood gathering areas, the same vendor was able to sell, at most, only two carts per month at 5000 MRO each, earning a monthly income of 10,000 MRO.

Humanitarian assistance: The government has ongoing humanitarian food assistance programs providing for the distribution of free food rations and cash transfer payments (of from 12,000 to 22,000 MRO per month) to certain target households for a period of three to four months depending on the magnitude of their food consumption gaps as measured by the joint food security survey conducted by the WFP and CSA (the national Food Security Agency) in March. The pastoral assistance program involving the sale of 30,296 metric tons of animal feed at government-subsidized prices (3500 MRO for a 50 kg bag of feed) has been operating since the beginning of April. So far, these programs have had only a limited impact on account of the sharing of these rations by program recipients with other poor households not served by such programs.

Nutritional situation: The SMART nutrition survey conducted in June 2015 put the global acute malnutrition rate in Magta Lahjar and Aleg at 14.4 percent [10.8 – 18.8], slightly higher than in 2013, the last year for which there is nutritional data available, when the GAM rate was at 13.2 percent [10.5-16.4]. According to the same survey, the crude mortality date for children under five was 0.24 per 10,000 population per day [0.06 – 1.00].

Assumptions

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

- **Farming:** Even with the likelihood of an average rainy season, there will probably not be large areas planted in *diéri* (rainfed) crops on account of the large numbers of wandering animals which, for years, have been destroying the crops of poor households without the means to protect them. Besides, since crops grow faster than pastures, early-planted crops are often lost and poor households have a hard time finding more seeds. However, near-average levels of cumulative rainfall should help ensure the flooding of bottomland and dammed areas used to grow crops between October and December and serving are the main sources of crops (cereals and cowpeas) and income for poor households in this livelihood zone. Thus, there will be low levels of cereal production more or less comparable to figures for the past two years.
- **Pastoral conditions:** Based on the outlook for an average rainy season, conditions were expected to start to improve by the first dekad of July, producing usable pastures by the first dekad of August and, thus, sharply limiting the use of wheat to feed livestock and purchases of animal feed. Area pastures will meet the needs of local and transhumant livestock (livestock from Trarza. Inchiri, Adrar, and Tagant heading back from seasonal grazing lands) between September and December.
- **Household food stocks:** Poor households will have stocks of home-grown crops only between September and December. They will be completely dependent on humanitarian assistance programs and markets for their food supplies between July and August.
- **Market supplies:** Course grain supplies will start to improve as of August, once the growth of new edible pasture for livestock reduces the demand from pastoralists for imported cereal crops from Mali. Without this competition, traders will be able to purchase supplies of sorghum and maize for human consumption. While it has picked up to some extent, there will be very limited cross-border trade with Senegal compared with the same time in an average year, with a large part of this trade diverted to markets in the northern part of the country where, in spite of average yields of *walo* crops, there were well-below-average levels of cereal production. The flow of trade from Mali, which is expecting an average rainy season, will speed up to some extent, but will be curtailed by Senegalese demand. Most trade during the outlook period will involve maize and sorghum.

- **Cereal and livestock prices:** Prices for sorghum on the Magta Lahjar market, the main market in this area, will stabilize between August and September before starting to rise again between October and December, fluctuating between 280 and 320 MRO/kg, driven by needs for seeds for flood-recession crops. Prices for wheat should stabilize (at around 150 MRO/kg) through December barring any shock to international imports. Prices for an average sheep (and for livestock in general) on the Magta Lahjar market will be on the rise, driven by demand for the celebration of the end of Ramadan in July and of Tabaski in November. However, sales of female animals, which are normally seen only in crisis years, could continue through August, as the general focus of demand from parties looking to build a livestock herd**.**
- **Seasonal income:** There will continue to be low levels of seasonal income from farm labor between July and September with fears of wandering animals expected to preclude the planting of large areas in *diéri* crops, regardless of trends in rainy season conditions. On the other hand, there should be rising levels of income between October and December with the demand for labor in flood-recession farming areas. In fact, in all probability, many migrant workers engaged in short-term seasonal labor migration will not return by the beginning of the rainy season. With needs for farm labor liable to outstrip supply, wage rates for day labor are expected to rise by 25 to 50 percent and there should be a one and one half to two times longer work period compared with the average of around 10 to 15 days of work per month.
- **Migrant remittances:** The already extremely limited flow of migrant remittances from short-term seasonal labor migration will fall off sharply between July and August compared with the period from March through May with the return of migrant workers. In line with normal seasonal trends, it will remain extremely low between September and December.
- **Assistance programs:** Between June and September 2015, poor households will receive free food assistance distributed by the government and the WFP and cash transfer payments (made by the WFP, Save the Children, OXFAM, and Action Against Hunger) ranging from 12,000 to 22,000 MRO depending on the area and on whether or not they are getting free food assistance. These cash payments will be used to purchase supplies in government-run *"boutiques de solidarité"* at prices 30 to 40 percent below regular market prices. However, in practice, the sharing of this assistance with other poor households in the community not served by these programs is limiting their impact. The only remaining programs in this area after the end of September will be classic (structural) programs such as the *"boutiques de solidarité"* (BS), village-level security stocks (SAVS), and outpatient therapeutic feeding centers (CRENAMs). School meal programs are suspended during summer vacation and will not resume until October with the start of the new school year, operating through December.
- **Nutritional situation:** There will continue to be high rates of global acute malnutrition through September, which will come down quickly (more quickly than in the Senegal River Valley) with the improvement in pastoral conditions and farming of rainfed bottomland areas as of August, providing poor households with new infusions of food (edible leaves and wild plant foods) and cash (from farm labor), which will strengthen their food access.

Most likely food security outcomes

As of June 2015, after two consecutive years of poor harvests, poor households had been basically dependent on market purchase for their food supplies since February/March, which is normally not the case until May/June. Their seasonal incomes are well below average income levels for this time of year, when the start of the rainy season normally affords them good employment and income-generating opportunities. They are consuming less and less sorghum and eating mostly wheat and locally grown rice purchased in government-subsidized *"boutiques de solidarité"* or furnished by humanitarian assistance programs. Accordingly, poor households are still experiencing food consumption gaps, which will keep them in a state of Crisis (IPC Phase 3 and 3!) through September.

The improvement in pastoral conditions as of the end of July or the beginning of August will help livestock physically recover and quickly force up prices. Thus, there should be an improvement in terms of trade for pastoralists between the middle of August and December. Logically, September harvests of early crops should fill the gap left by the shutdown of current assistance programs in September and strengthen the food security capacity of poor households, which will experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of food insecurity between October and December.

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	Well-below-average rainfall during the upcoming rainy season, hampering new pasture growth and farming activities	This will preclude the normal improvement in the physical condition of livestock and milk availability between July and September. Poor agropastoral households will have below-average levels of income from farm labor and limited food access on local markets.
	A locust infestation between September and November	Destruction of crops and pastures, prolonging the lean season
	Atypical rise in international market prices for wheat and rice	The deterioration in terms of trade will curtail the food access of poor households.
	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 food and pastoral assistance programs	High likelihood of a rise in food prices, sharply curtailing the food access of poor households relying on this assistance to manage their food insecurity. The result would be an escalation in food insecurity in all areas currently served by these programs (BS, SAVS, CRENAM, CS, etc.)
Agropastoral zone and Senegal River Valley	An extremely poor rainy season, with local pastures and pastures in receiving areas for transhumant livestock herds in poor condition	Losses of animals severely eroding household livelihoods and translating into below-average food supplies and incomes
	Well-below-average levels of rainy season rice production due to a lack of credit or crop failures	Prolongation of the lean season in the Senegal River Valley
	Sharp decline in the price of livestock	Sharp depreciation in terms of trade to the detriment of poor households
	Under-production of *walo* crops due to low flood levels along the river or a lack of interest on the part of farmers	Reduction in the seasonal incomes of poor households from farm labor between October and December

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.