

1. Summary

Rainfall conditions improved considerably during the third decade of June and the first decade of July. Planting has started in most agricultural areas of the *wilayas (regions)* in the south and southeast. The first patches of pastureland can be seen in the southeast of Gorgol and along the border with Mali, stretching from south of Selibaby to south of Kobonni *moughataa* (prefecture) in Hodh El Gharbi. The locust situation is still quiet. Bird control measures have started in the Trarza and Gorgol *wilayas*. A mission of the Ministry of Rural Development and Environment (MDRE) that has just visited walo (river recessional) and *bas fonds* (lowland recessional) crop production zones confirms that a heavy infestation of *sesamie* caterpillars can be expected during the current agricultural season. The National Agency for Rural Development (SONADER) and village cooperatives are actively preparing for the irrigated agricultural season (principally rice and maize).

The food situation continues to worsen in the agricultural production zones of Gorgol and Brakna. In the structurally deficit zones of the North (Inchiri and Adrar *wilayas*) food availability has improved, thanks to free food distributions and sales of wheat at subsidized prices organized by the Food Security Commissariat (CSA), supported by its donor partners. In urban centers, increases in the price of basic food staples (rice, vegetable oil, meat, fish and so on) have aggravated vulnerability levels. In the rural areas in Trarza, Brakna and Gorgol that were flooded during the rainy season last year, recent wheat distributions have had the effect of temporarily lowering the price of traditional cereals (particularly sorghim and millet).

2. Agro-Pastoral Conditions

2.1. Rainfall

The rainy season has set in the southern part of the country, starting in the third decade of June. Average and occasionally heavy rains were registered throughout the first decade of July in southern Gorgol, in Guidimaka and Hodh El Gharbi. These rains were well spaced (falling 3 or 4 days within the 10-day period). Compared to the same period in 1999 and the 1989-95 average, several weather stations in the farming areas registered below-normal rainfall, indicating a late start of the rainy season (Selibaby –66.5 mm, M'Bagne –55.4 mm, Nema –26,7 mm, et Bousteilla – 25 mm, Touil –79 mm).

2.2. Crop Situation

Crops sown during late June and early July are at the emergence and growth stage. Farmers in some zones had to resow after wandering livestock trampled their plants. Analysis carried out by the AGRHYMET substation in Mauritania shows that crops sown at the end of June have satisfactory moisture except in the zone extending from the southern *moughataa* of Kankossa in Assaba to Amourj *moughataa* in the Hodh El Gharbi. This deficit zone, that also includes the *moughataas* of Kobenni and Djiguenni, is characterized by sandy soils in the higher ground and clay soils in the depressions.

Many farmers are hesitating to invest their efforts in a cropping season that, in their eyes, is already lost because no caterpillar control measures have been taken for the past three years. Caterpillars have systematically destroyed crops in Brakna, Gorgol and in the *bas-fonds* areas of the two Hodhs. Throughout Boghé *moughataa* and the western part of Bababé *moughataa*, farmers are not planting cereal crops, but watermelons and niébé (beans) that are less susceptible to caterpillar damage.

The MDRE believes that sufficient inputs (fuel and fertilizers) are available for irrigated agriculture, but the main problem is farmer access to these inputs. The majority of agricultural cooperatives, whose crops were submerged by floods last year, did not repay their production loans and are no longer eligible for further loans from *Credit Agricole*. Nonetheless, the last Council of Ministers session decided to look into the possibility of rescheduling this farmer debt.

2.3. Pastoralist Situation

With the first rains and regeneration of pastures, more and more herders are taking their livestock (mainly cattle and camels) on the usual seasonal migration to distant grazing lands. These seasonal migrations often damage newly planted crops while passing through farming areas. Animal health conditions remain good.

2.4. Plant Health Situation

The locust situation is calm and not threatening. In contrast, the bird situation is so worrisome that the MDRE is considering aerial spraying of bird in Gorgol and Trarza wilayas. Till now, no practical measures have been taken to contain caterpillars that have destroyed cereal crops these past three years.

3. Food Access

3.1. Price Trends

Staple food prices increased from about 5-10% during June. Markets, however, are well supplied. Prices of traditional cereals dropped slightly as a result of large volumes of wheat on the market. It is widely believed that this drop will be short-lived and is mostly due to food aid distributions currently underway for people who experienced hardship during the 1999 floods. Initially intended to last five months, this food distribution (wheat and vegetable oil) has been cut to three months. The instability in fish prices is caused by prevailing bad weather (strong winds that disturb fishing grounds and even blow fishing boats back to shore) and by the recurrence of the Mauritanian-Senegalese crisis in June when many Senegalese fishermen returned to Senegal.

3.2. Vulnerability Update

Levels of vulnerability are rising in the farming zones in the Senegal River Valley. Food distributions there are insignificant (1 bag de 50 kg of cereals per 2 families). At this start of the agricultural season it is indispensable to support the farming population so they have the necessary energy for fieldwork.