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MALI: Food Security Outlook — October 2013 to March 2014

Early harvests mark the end of the lean season in agropastoral areas

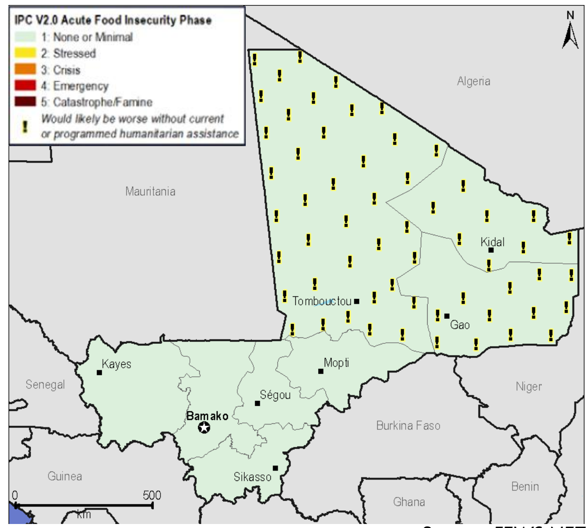
KEY MESSAGES

- With the exception of a few isolated incidents, the securitization of northern Mali has allowed for the reestablishment of near-normal movements of people and goods. IDPs and refugees are actively returning to their homes with the help of the government and the humanitarian community in the form of transportation services, as well as food and nonfood assistance.

- Harvests are expected to be average, which should ensure adequate staple food supplies on both northern and southern markets. In addition to good market supplies in northern areas, harvests of wild fonio and certain early-maturing crops are bolstering household food availability.

- Cereal market prices are seasonally declining due to ongoing harvests and are expected to continue to fall through December/January. Good livestock prices are also strengthening incomes for pastoral households who are taking advantage of good terms of trade to rebuild their cereal stocks.

Figure 1. Current food security outcomes for October 2013

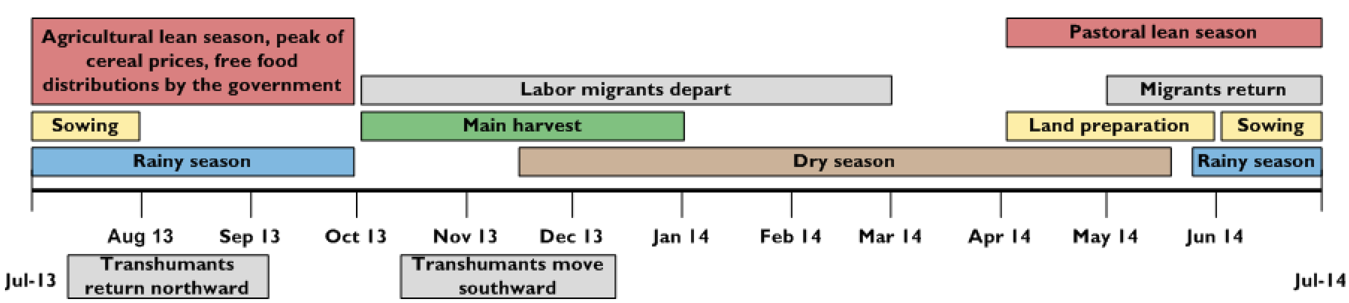


Source: *FEWS NET*

This map represents *acute* food insecurity outcomes relevant for emergency decision-making, and do not necessarily reflect *chronic* food insecurity.

- The availability of early crops in millet-producing areas and the improvement in terms of trade for pastoralists by more than 30 percent are helping to ease Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security conditions that have been observed in northern areas since July. In addition to the availability of fresh millet crops in October, rice harvests between November and January will enable households to meet their food needs. The combination of these factors, plus continuing humanitarian food assistance through December and the arrival of crops from southern surplus-production areas that are selling at near-average prices, will cause households to face Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity throughout the outlook period.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



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NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Security situation

Since June 2013, conditions in northern Mali are marked by a steady improvement in security despite reports of localized incidents, such as suicide attacks, in certain urban centers (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal). While these incidents have disturbed the peace, they have not yet significantly affected the economic recovery of these areas, triggered by the resumption of pubic services and the return of IDPs and refugees.

Growing season

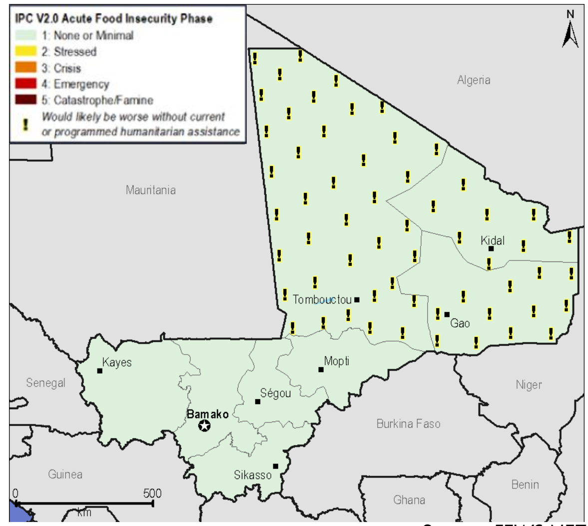
The relatively large amounts of rain that fell during the first dekad of October helped to correct the slight delay in crop development reported earlier in the season. Most cereals and pulses are in the maturation to harvesting stages, and early harvests of all crop types are underway throughout the country.

Crop production forecasts for most agricultural areas are indicating average harvests. However due to an extended dry spell in September, these forecasts show localized pockets of below-average production in the Mopti (Bandiangara, Djenné), Koulikoro (Banamba), Ségou (Ségou, Niono), and Kayes regions (Yélimané and the northern reaches of Dièma and Nioro), as well as along riverine areas of Gao department and localized areas of Gourma in Timbuktu. Cropping rates are average but 12 percent below last year's levels due to crops being planted late. According to the FAO and national locust control agencies, the locust situation is calm.

Pastures and livestock conditions

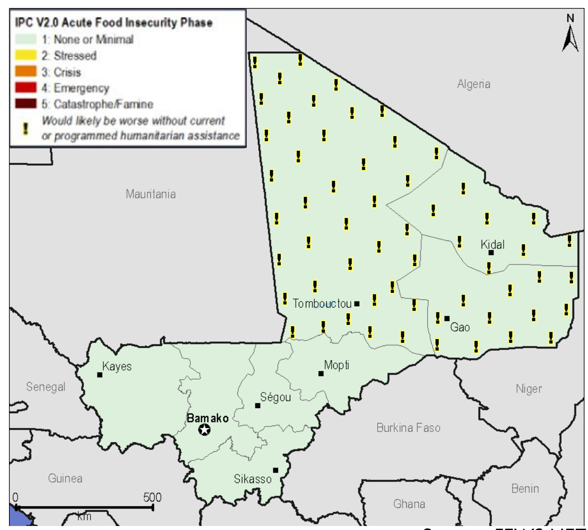
Pasture conditions are average to above-average across pastoral areas and animal watering holes are at sufficient levels to support herd movements. Animal herds are in their usual rainy-season holding areas and are about to begin their return migration with the start of harvesting activities. During the month of November, there will be normal herd movements in northern pastoral areas to permanent watering holes and floodplain pastures (*bourgoutières*), such as those in Mopti. However, certain nomadic pastoralists who left the country out of fear of losing their livestock during the conflict have still not returned. Livestock in all areas of the country are in good physical condition and milk production levels are average to good.

Figure 2. Projected food security outcomes, October to December 2013



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 3. Projected food security outcomes, January to March 2014



Source: *FEWS NET*

This map represents *acute* food insecurity outcomes relevant for emergency decision-making, and do not necessarily reflect *chronic* food insecurity.

The situation with regards to animal diseases is stable. Herd-building programs mounted by certain humanitarian organizations are helping to restore household livelihoods, and rebuild milk production and incomes from livestock sales. In some areas where technical agencies are having difficulties starting back up, assistance programs are vaccinating livestock to protect animal health conditions.

Mobility and trade flows

There has been a visible improvement in commercial trade and traffic along trade routes between southern and northern Mali since June with the liberation of occupied areas. The resumption of shipping activities by the *Compagnie Malienne de la Navigation* and *"pinassiers"* (boatmen manning traditional flat-bottomed canoes) with the rise in river water levels is helping to improve mobility for households residing in riverine communities. These shipping activities are expected to remain at current levels until the beginning of the low-water level period in April. This improvement in mobility has not only revitalized markets, but has also improved the ability of humanitarian organizations to service these communities. However, there has also been an escalation in armed robberies targeting mostly pastoralists and traders in areas close to Mali's borders with Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Algeria, which has occasionally disrupting the flow of imports to local markets. However, these incidents have had generally little impact on market supply in affected areas.

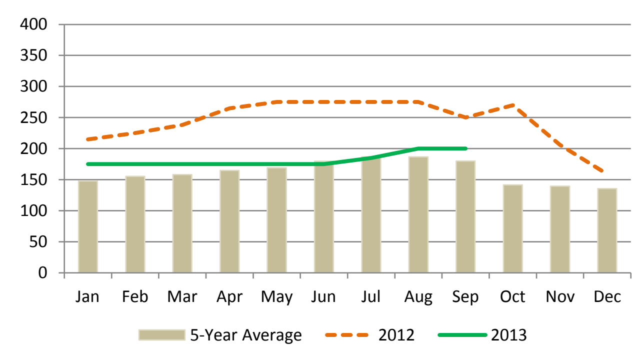
Market functioning and prices

Markets in southern Mali are functioning normally despite seasonally low cereal demand due to good food availability at the household-level from early harvests of cereals, cowpeas, fonio, earthpea, and tubers. In addition, supply levels on certain markets are large as traders and better-off farmers are in the process of destocking.

Northern markets are functioning quasi-normally since the deployment of MINUSMA and local forces in July. As usual, markets in urban areas are getting their food supplies from southern surplus-producing areas and from neighboring countries (Algeria and Niger). In the interior areas of northern Mali, food flows remain at below-normal levels due to security risks associated with residual banditry, especially in the region of Kidal. Imports of rice, semolina, and flour from Algeria have resumed, but are still being disrupted by acts of sabotage along major trade routes. There is also growing demand from IDPs and refugees although this demand remains still at below-average levels due to assistance programs by humanitarian organizations.

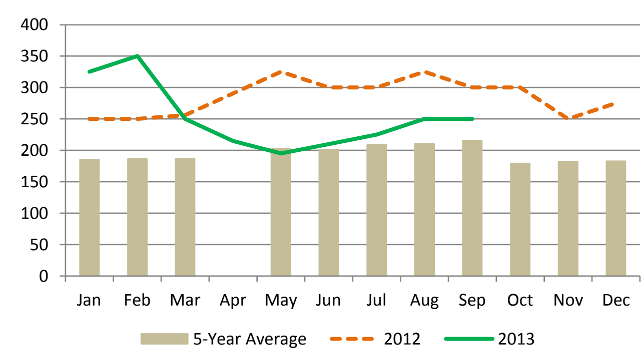
In September, staple food prices (millet, sorghum, and rice) on nearly all northern and southern markets were stable compared to August and were lower than last year's levels (Figures 4 and 5). Moreover, according to preliminary price data for October, cereal prices trends in southern Mali suggest the beginning of the normal seasonal decline in prices between October and December due to the start of the harvest period. This five to 20 percent decline in prices will help improve household food access. Price movements in northern Mali are following similar trends, particularly in the lake areas of Timbuktu. October prices for food imported from southern Mali were stable compared to the previous month and approximately 15 percent above-average.

Figure 4. Nominal retail prices for millet in Ségou (XOF/kg)



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 5. Nominal retail prices for millet in Gao (XOF/kg)



Source: *FEWS NET*

Business on livestock markets in northern pastoral areas is increasingly brisk with the return of wholesale traders. Livestock exports to Niger and Algeria are fueling demand, while supplies are below-average. The large volume of sales for the celebration of Tabaski (in October) helped pastoralists profit from significant sales opportunities. In addition, good livestock body conditions and high demand have caused prices to be more than 25 percent above-average, particularly for small ruminants. This is helping to significantly improve incomes for pastoral and agropastoral households.

Return of IDPs and refugees

IDPs and refugees have been actively returning to their homes since June with the help of the government and the humanitarian community. As of the end of September, over 144,000 IDPs out of a total displaced population of 353,455 have been repatriated, according to the IOM. These households are receiving food assistance and are being served by rehabilitation programs (income-generating activities and the distribution of livestock) mounted by the government and humanitarian organizations to help facilitate their socioeconomic reintegration. According to reports from various northern cities, needs for food and other amenities, such as home repair services and fuel, are creating opportunities for the revitalization of economic activities, while the labor furnished by members of poor households is bolstering household incomes.

Humanitarian assistance

Distributions of food, cash, livestock, and farm inputs continue in areas hard hit by the security crisis and by the 2011-2012 drought in the Western Sahel. With the improving security situation since June, these programs have helped improve the day-to-day lives of at-risk households, enabling them to limit their recourse to negative coping strategies. Input assistance has also helped northern agropastoral households successfully engage in farming activities to strengthen their livelihoods while, at the same time, providing job opportunities for poor households who dependent on this type of employment. These various programs, mounted since June 2013, will continue through December despite problems with funding gaps. As of September 30th, funding levels were at only 38 percent (43 percent for the food security component).

Food security

The first harvests of early crops and lean season foods, such as earthpeas, cowpeas, and tubers, in late September marketed the end of the lean season in southern Mali. Income from the sale of cash crops, such as groundnuts, watermelons, fonio, and fresh maize, at slightly above-average prices is enabling households to meet their food and nonfood needs. With these positive trends in food security drivers, households in southern Mali are facing Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity in October.

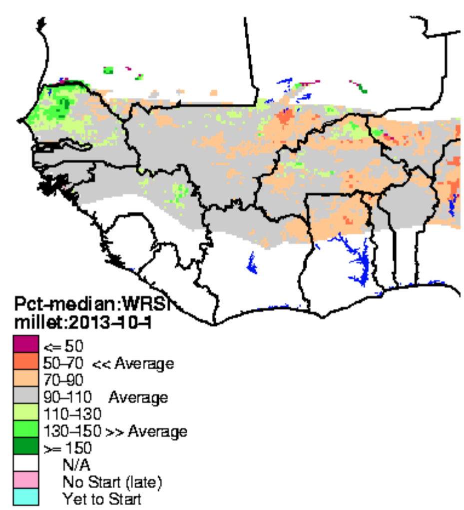
Early harvests of flood-recession and rainfed crops in both northern and southern areas are steadily improving food availability for agropastoral households. Ongoing harvests of wild foods (wild fonio and water lilies), good milk production, and distributions of food rations by humanitarian organizations are maintaining household food access. Good livestock prices, which are more than 25 percent above-average, are also providing pastoral households with better food access, particularly with the stabilization and, in some cases, the decline in staple food prices on certain markets. SMART and EFSA surveys conducted during the lean season (June/July) found malnutrition rates of 13.5 percent and 12.4 percent. While treatment centers are dysfunctional due to shortages of personnel and supplies, malnutrition rates are still below normal levels of approximately 15 percent in northern areas. With humanitarian assistance programs and the improvement of local conditions, northern households who have been facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food insecurity situation since July are now currently facing Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity.

Assumptions

The most likely food security scenario for October 2013 to March 2014 is based on the following national assumptions:

- **Security situation:** Ongoing efforts to improve security across the country will help the socioeconomic recovery continue, particularly in northern areas. However, renewed tensions with rebel groups over the implementation of the Ouagadougou agreement are creating localized unrest in the town of Kidal. Such incidents will continue to disrupt the peace and the normal functioning of trade networks, particularly in Kidal.
- **Crop production:** In general, forecasts for the current growing season are predicting average harvests, with localized pockets of below-average production in the Mopti (Bandiangara and Djenné), Koulikoro (Banamba and Nara), Ségou (Ségou and Macina), and Kayes regions (Yélimané and northern Dièma and Nioro), as well as in riverine areas of Gao department and parts of Gourma in Timbuktu (Figure 6).
- **Off-season crops:** Due to assistance programs, irrigation schemes, and enthusiasm for market gardening activities between October and March, there will be more extensive off-season farming activities this year compared to normal. Assistance programs that are providing large quantities of agricultural inputs will enable off-season wheat and rice production in January to be relatively normal.
- **Market dependence:** Households in localized areas that experienced poor harvests will be market-dependent one

Figure 6. WRSI anomalies (median year)



Source: *USGS*

to two months earlier than usual.

- **Cereal prices:** Cereal supplies will increase in October as first shipments from the recent harvests arrive on local markets and as households sell cereal stocks to meet financial needs relating to Tabaski celebrations and school fees. This abundant supply will cause prices to decline, in line with seasonal trends. While demand on markets across the country will be higher than last year's levels, it will still be within the average range due to the normalization of trade flows, particularly to cereal-deficit areas in western and northern Mali. Prices will be below 2012 levels and close to the five-year average during the entire outlook period.
- **Herd movements and livestock production:** Livestock production will be average due to new pasture growth and water levels in animal watering holes. Seasonal migration by transhumant herds to dry-season pastoral areas will start up in November and December, except for in floodplain areas of Mopti where a shortage of surface watering holes in emergent pasture wetland areas will trigger earlier than normal movements to flood-irrigated grassland areas (*bourgoutières*) in the Inner Niger Delta during the month of October.
- **Livestock prices:** Prices for livestock will remain more than 20 percent above-average until December as demand normalizes after the end of the celebration of Tabaski, a high livestock demand period. The expected average to good pastoral conditions will also help keep livestock prices above-average throughout the outlook period, with no cause for pastoralists to thin their herds.
- **Migration and population movements:** The departure of migrant workers in November/December to major crop-producing areas will improve food availability for poor households in areas with below-average harvests. Between September (the end of the growing season) and April, there will be normal seasonal labor migration to urban areas in Mali and to neighboring countries from both northern and southern areas of the country. There will also be a normal flow of remittance income, which will help to improve household food access. The flow of returning IDPs and refugees will increase during the outlook period with the improving security situation.
- **Fishing:** Average breeding conditions for fish populations in rivers and streams will translate into average catches during the fishing season that begins in December. High fish prices are encouraging fishing households to increase their catches, particularly in riverine areas of Gao that were hard hit by a poor rice harvest. Assistance provided by the government and certain partners in the form of fishing and conservation equipment will help fishermen increase their profits.
- **Economic activity/incomes:** Business in northern Mali will gradually return to normal with the stabilization of conditions in that area. Farm labor needs during the harvest season will provide employment opportunities to vulnerable households in northern areas, as well as in the south. Very poor households will also be helped by the availability of wild foods and average to below-average (depending on the area) in-kind payments for crop harvesting activities. Finally, normal income-generating activities, such as transportation services, petty trade, and craft-making, will provide poor households in these areas with incomes, though at slightly below-average levels.
- **Humanitarian programs:** Scheduled food assistance, herd-building, and cash transfer programs through December and beyond will help poor households in northern areas rebuild their livelihoods. The scale of such programs in northern Mali will be at above-average levels. High-priority programs scheduled between now and December will serve more than 360,000 households in northern areas.
- **Nutritional situation:** The nutritional situation should be relatively normal. The strengthening of ongoing preventive and therapeutic feeding programs through rehabilitation activities, as well as the provisioning of inputs, will help improve nutritional conditions across the country. Average household food access and the diversification of food intake due to better harvests of market gardening and off-season cereal crops will help prevent a rise in malnutrition rates.

Most likely food security outcomes

In the south, the first harvests of short-cycle crops at the end of September have helped to improve household food availability. Cereal supplies from in-kind wage payments to members of poor households during the harvest season will provide these households with extra food stocks. Cereal prices on markets near crop-producing areas are decline and will bottom out between October and January. Expected cereal price levels between February and March will also enable food access for highly market-dependent poor households. Typical income sources for poor and very poor households, such as wage labor and self-employment (trade, sales of wood, craft-making, sales of cash crops, etc.), will provide normal levels of income, enabling households to meet their nonfood (health and education) needs. Harvests of market garden produce between December and March will also generate income and help diversify the household diet. **These food security drivers will allow very poor and poor households to continue to experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity throughout the outlook period.**

In northern pastoral areas, the improvement in household incomes with the reopening of local markets and rising livestock prices (currently more than 25 percent above-average) will help provide good food access. Terms of trade will peak and will be favorable to pastoralists looking to replenish their household food stocks between October and January. Milk production and wild food harvests between October and March will also bolster household food availability. Humanitarian assistance, which is an important source of food (distributions of food rations) and income (cash payments) for poor households, will very likely continue beyond December.

Poor refugees and IDPs returning to northern Mali will have a hard time mainstreaming into the local socioeconomic fabric, which will affect their livelihoods, even with the economic recovery in that part of the country. However, livestock sales at prices that are more than 25 percent above average will generate above-average incomes from this source.

In riverine areas (livelihood zone 3), upcoming rice harvests in December and January are expected to be well below-average, causing poor households, whose incomes have also been below-average, to resort to market purchases earlier than normal this year. However, ongoing humanitarian food and nonfood assistance programs will prevent households from resorting to negative coping strategies to meet their needs. As a result, poor and very poor households will experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity between now and next March.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Livelihood zones 1 (Nomadism and trans-Saharan trade) and 2 (Nomadic and transhumant pastoralism)

Current situation

The mainstays of the local economy in these two livelihood zones are transhumant or nomadic livestock raising (livelihood zone 2), trans-Saharan trade between large cities in Mali (Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao) and with Algeria, migration, and craft-making. There is very little to no crop production, particularly in livelihood zone 1, and populations in both areas are market dependant year round for both their food supplies and for livestock sales. This heavy dependence on local markets and on livestock causes these populations to be highly vulnerable to anomalies in market and pastoral conditions.

Despite the improvement in security conditions since June, localized acts of armed robbery continue to hamper the movement of people and goods in certain areas, particularly in the Kidal and Gao regions. Efforts are underway to increase security to help normalize socioeconomic conditions in these areas. Relatively good levels of new woody and herbaceous pasture growth and high water levels in local watering holes are creating good pastoral conditions. This is, in turn, sustaining milk production (vital for pastoral populations) and keeping livestock in good physical condition (leading to better livestock prices). Herd movements by transhumant livestock in rainy-season grazing areas are normal and are helping to ensure the efficient use of available pasture.

The gradual improvement in market functioning is helping to increase trade flows from southern and central regions of Mali. Though somewhat more limited than usual due to continuing security problems, ongoing imports of rice, milk, and pasta products from Algeria are meeting the needs of local populations.

The current availability of wild foods (wild fonio and cram-cram grass) is helping poor households rebuild their food stocks. This is an extremely common strategy used by many poor households to limit their market dependence.

Millet prices are down 10 percent from last month but are still above the five-year average by 10 percent in Timbuktu and 17 percent in Ansongo. With the return of wholesale traders from southern Mali, Niger, and Algeria and good pastoral conditions in this area, livestock prices are more than 25 percent above-average, dramatically improving household income. At 25 to 35 percent above-average, livestock/cereal terms of trade are favorable to pastoralists. Large income streams from livestock sales during the Tabaski holiday period (in October) are also helping pastoral households replenish their food stocks.

Humanitarian organizations are scaling up their assistance programs in pastoral areas with the deployment of MINUSMA troops and the signing of preliminary peace accords by the Malian government and Tuareg rebels. Distributions of small ruminants and cash by humanitarian agencies to more than 20,000 households are currently in progress.

Assumptions

The most likely food security scenario for these two livelihood zones for the period of October 2013 to March 2014 is based on the following region-specific assumptions:

- **Security situation**: Conditions will remain volatile, with an above-average number of localized incidents disrupting population movements from time to time throughout the outlook period. Local households will engage in their usual activities, although they will generate less income than usual.
- **Pastoral conditions:** The good availability of pasture resources will enable pastoralists to earn above-average incomes from sales of livestock and animal products between October and March. The lean season for local livestock will be normal.
- **Markets:** The normal operation of local markets since August/September 2013 will provide members of poor households with good employment opportunities in livestock trade and/or driving herds to markets. Food prices for rice and pasta, which are stable or down from last month and just slightly above-average, will help households maintain their market access throughout the outlook period. Livestock prices are more than 25 percent above-average, bolstering incomes of pastoral households. Livestock/cereal terms of trade for are more than 40 percent above-average, strengthening household food access.
- **Humanitarian operations**: Scheduled resilience-building programs by the government and humanitarian organizations throughout the outlook period, such as distributions of small ruminants to poor households, will strengthen livelihoods. Cash payments and food assistance will also provide vulnerable households with access to food and other commodities, preventing them from resorting to negative coping strategies, such as skipping meals, during the outlook period.

Most likely food security outcomes

Due to a total dependency on local markets, food security trends for poor households will be the same across the two livelihood zones.

The improvement in security conditions will help spur economic recovery, employment opportunities for members of poor households, and the return of IDPs. There will also be a continuing flow of food supplies from markets in the south to pastoral areas. Likewise, there will be a steady flow of imports from Algeria which, despite occasional disruptions, will help meet local demand, particularly for households in Kidal.

Food access is visibly better than in previous months and will be maintained by pastoral households throughout the outlook period. Current drivers of favorable livestock prices (high demand and good livestock body conditions) will help improve household purchasing power. The improvement in terms of trade will help pastoral households rebuild their food stocks between October and January.

Ongoing harvests of wild fonio and cram-cram grass by poor households will reduce their market dependence between October and January and generate household income. In addition, good milk production levels will continue to help households diversify their diets.

The improvement in pastoral conditions and terms of trade and ongoing livelihood assistance programs by humanitarian organizations will allow very poor and poor households to experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity between October 2013 and March 2014.

Livelihood zone 3 (Fluvial rice and transhumant livestock rearing)

Current situation

The improvement in the security situation in this area is spurring the return of IDPs and refugees. This return migration, along with the reopening of government offices and technical agencies, is helping to bolster the socioeconomic recovery in the Gao and Timbuktu regions. According to the IOM, more than 144,000 people had returned to their homes as of the end of September. Security is being increased to reduce any remaining pockets of instability.

The growing season in this area has had its ups and downs. Crop maintenance activities are currently underway, particularly in village irrigation schemes. These activities are regular sources of food and income for poor populations dependent on wage labor at this time of year. Normal cropping rates are down this year due to poor rainfall conditions during the rainy season and low flood levels, particularly in Gao department and parts of Ansongo (Bara) and Bourem (Taboye) departments. As a result, production is expected to be over 30 percent lower than last year's levels. Preparations for the planting of market garden crops are also underway. Above-average incomes from the sale of market garden crops are expected due to high demand between November and March and will bolster food security and incomes for market gardeners. An expansion of market gardening activities is expected in areas hard hit by the rainfall deficits during the 2013 rainy season as households attempt to make up for harvest shortfalls. A normal availability of water, free agricultural inputs from humanitarian organizations, and an earlier than normal start-up of gardening activities is expected to translate into above-average harvests for these crops.

A growing demand for staple foods with the return of IDPs and the improvement in household incomes are contributing to an increase in trade with the southern areas of Mali. However, import volumes from Algeria are still below-average. During the coming months, the availability of Algerian products (milk, rice, pasta, and flour) will depend on future developments in the security situation and the reinforcement of military controls. Average cereal supplies on major source markets for the Timbuktu and Gao regions are sufficient to meet local demand. The resumption of river transportation to most major markets in the riverine area between July and December/January (depending on river water levels) will help market supplies further improve.

The availability of off-season rice crops in July-August and flood-recession crops from ongoing harvests is improving current food availability, particularly in lake areas of Timbuktu. This is reducing local households' dependency on markets.

Millet prices in Gao are still 16 percent above-average, but down 17 percent compared to September 2013. Meanwhile, rice prices are up seven percent in Gao and up 10 percent in Timbuktu compared to last month. Compared to average, rice prices are approximately six percent below-average in Timbuktu and near-average in Gao.

The stabilization or, in some cases, decline in food prices, ongoing harvests near seasonal and year-round lakes, and humanitarian assistance programs are maintaining household food access, particularly since economic activities have resumed, IDPs have returned, and government offices have reopened. The government and humanitarian agencies are currently distributing food and nonfood assistance to IDPs and refugees to help facilitate their socioeconomic reintegration. Between March 2013 and the end of September, over 280,000 recipients in the Timbuktu and Gao regions received food assistance from the WFP and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In addition, the opening of banks and the resumption of trading activities are causing related economic activities to return to near normal levels. Finally, ongoing reconstruction and/or repair work in northern areas are creating above-average employment opportunities for local households.

The availability of milk and fish is average and is helping to significantly improve the household diet. In addition, ongoing preventive and therapeutic feeding programs mounted by the government and humanitarian organizations since June are limiting the deterioration in nutritional conditions.

Near-average on-farm and off-farm employment opportunities and continuing multifaceted humanitarian assistance programs are helping poor households meet their food needs during this period just prior to the start of the main harvest season (November-December). These positive factors, along with migrant remittances that are an important source of income for households residing in this zone, are contributing to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity in November.

Assumptions

The most likely food security scenario in this livelihood zone for October 2013 to March 2014 is based on the following region-specific assumptions:

- **Crop production:** The outlook for rice production is below-average, particularly in areas that experienced rainfall deficits where production shortfalls are expected to be over 30 percent. These poor harvests will limit household food availability and cause households to be market dependent one to two months earlier than normal.
- **Off-season crop production:** Large deliveries of assistance in the form of seeds and small farm implements will help expand off-season rice-farming and market gardening activities, particularly in areas that experienced poor main season harvests. This assistance will reduce production costs for poor households and increase their profits.
- **Fishing:** Current breeding conditions for fish suggest that catches will be relatively average. However, poor main season harvests and high fish prices (20 percent above average) are expected to cause an expansion of fishing

activities in certain areas. Given this area's accessibility and an absence of any factors impeding households from pursuing these activities, households will produce average to slightly above-average levels of food and income from fishing, surpassing last year's levels.

- **Trade:** Continued trade with normal source markets in southern Mali will ensure the availability of staple foods for households in this livelihood zone.
- **Migrant remittances:** In areas that experienced poor, main season harvests, migrant remittances will be above-average throughout the outlook period.
- **Economic recovery:** The economic recovery in northern areas of Mali will continue despite reports of localized security problems during the past month.

Most likely food security outcomes

Livelihood activities that provide food and income to poor households have been continuing to improve since June 2013 and are helping to strengthen food security. Upcoming November and December harvests will not only provide households with food, thus reducing their market dependence, but will also increase household incomes from crop sales. Continuing distributions of food rations by humanitarian organizations will also bolster food security and help prolong household food stocks, regardless of crop production levels.

In areas where production shortfalls are suspected, more members of poor households will resort to working for better-off households in irrigation schemes or will travel to key crop-producing areas within the region between November and December. The improvement in normal income-generating activities (wage labor, craft-making, and livestock trading) will guarantee average income levels and will help maintain market access for households. Regular market supplies from southern Mali will also help contribute to declining food prices between October and March. Resilience-building programs by the government and humanitarian agencies, including distributions of small ruminants, support programs for income-generating activities, and cash payments, will help households rebuild their livelihoods.

The combined effects of humanitarian programs mentioned above and migrant remittances will help keep acute food insecurity in this livelihood zone at Minimal (IPC Phase 1) levels between October 2013 and March 2014.

EVENTS THAT MIGHT CHANGE THE OUTLOOK

Table 1: Possible events over the next six months that could change the most-likely scenario

Area	Event	Impact on food security outcomes
Northern Mali (livelihood zones 3 & 4), Niger Delta, and Dogon Plateau (livelihood zones 5 & 6)	Severe crop damage from grain-eating birds	An infestation of grain-eating birds in Sahelian regions could cause large crop losses. This would lower crop yields and overall crop production levels for this growing season.
Northern Mali	Regression in the security situation in the north	In the event of failed peace talks, a resumption of hostilities would disrupt crop production and supply flows to northern Mali. The economic recovery would suffer and would adversely affect poor households.
National	Institutional stock-building activities by the government and procurements by humanitarian agencies between October and January	High demand from the government looking to rebuild its 35,000 MT national food security reserve, as well as from humanitarian organizations, would put above-average pressure on markets. In this case, price declines would be smaller than are currently anticipated and market prices would also begin to increase earlier than normal.
Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, and northern Mopti regions	Disruption of the free movement of people and goods	The peace process in northern Mali is steadily improving the vital flow of trade between northern areas and the rest of the country, as well as with neighboring countries. A new wave of attacks by rebel groups would damage ongoing efforts to normalize conditions. The flow of returnees would stop and there would be further population displacements in conflict areas. Trade flows to northern markets from the south and from neighboring countries would be interrupted, with a negative effect on household food availability and access.
Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, and northern Mopti regions	Suspension of humanitarian assistance programs	The suspension of humanitarian assistance before the start of the rice harvest would limit household food access for poor households.

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 those assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to develop scenarios estimating food security outcomes. Typically, FEWS NET reports the most likely scenario. To learn more about this approach to scenario development, visit www.fews.net/scenario_development.