

Poor rainfall delays food security improvements in the north

KEY MESSAGES

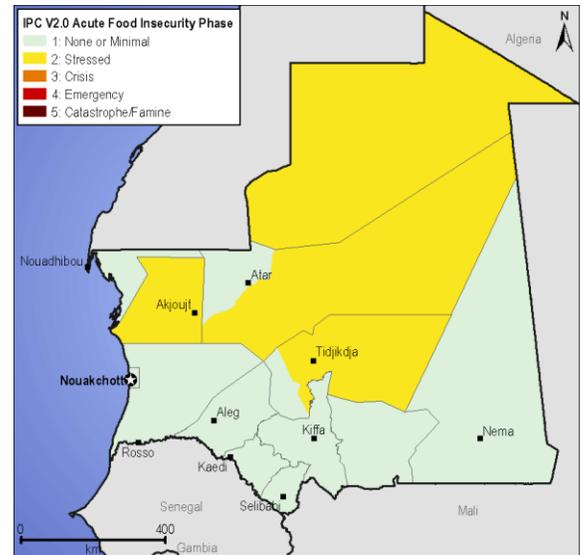
- Some areas in the northern pastoral zones are still showing rainfall deficits due to the below-average levels of rainfall to-date. However, seasonal forecasts are predicting average rainfall across the country, which should reverse current deficits, even the worst-off areas (Inchiri, Adrar, Dakhlet Nouadhibou, northern Tagant, and Tiris Zemmour), by late August. The expected improvement in pastoral conditions and rebound in agricultural activities should enable Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) by August/September.
- Poor households in the country's most densely populated rural areas are currently in Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1), bolstered by the rebound in seasonal farming and non-farming activities and average staple food availability.
- Retail markets are well-stocked with imported staple foods and locally grown cereals. Generally stable food prices, increasing livestock prices, continuing assistance programs, and access to agricultural income are helping to provide normal food availability and access for poor households.

CURRENT SITUATION

Seasonal progress: The pick-up in rainfall activity in early August helped reverse rainfall deficits (below-average rainfall totals) at a number of gauging stations around the country, except in the north where the small amounts of rain failed to jump-start farming activities and promote sufficient new pasture growth. With the failure of the pastoral assistance program to meet all local demand, pastoralists in these areas are still buying commercially marketed animal feed at prices ranging from 7500 to 9000 MRO/sack. Pastoral conditions and seasonal rainfed farming activities in the central and southern reaches of the country, which include most pastoral and crop-growing areas, are in line with seasonal norms, except in a few localized pockets of rainfall deficits (in central and northern Guidimakha, western and northern Assaba, northeastern Gorgol, and northern Hodh El Gharbi).

Progress of rainfed crops: Planting activities for rainfed crops are occurring throughout the southern and central areas of the country but, as of the beginning of August, early-maturing crops were still only in the tillering to height growth stages of development. This is not yet a source of concern, since many farmers have planted short-cycle varieties of crops, which should fully mature before the end of the season in October.

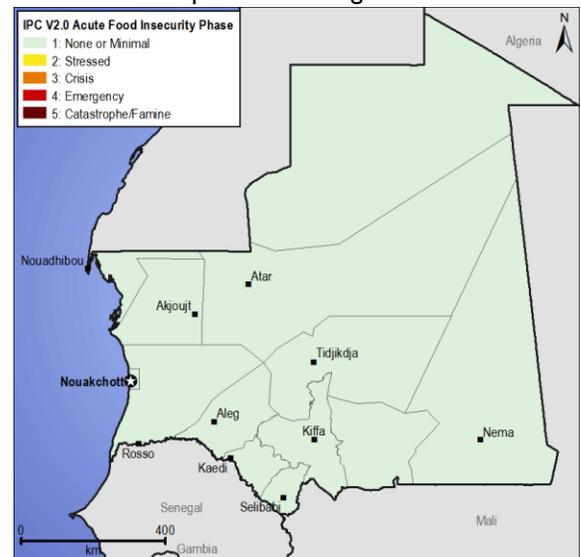
Figure 1 Current food security outcomes, August 2013



This map shows relevant current acute food insecurity outcomes for emergency decision-making. It does not necessary reflect chronic food insecurity.

Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2 Most likely estimated food security outcomes for September through November 2013



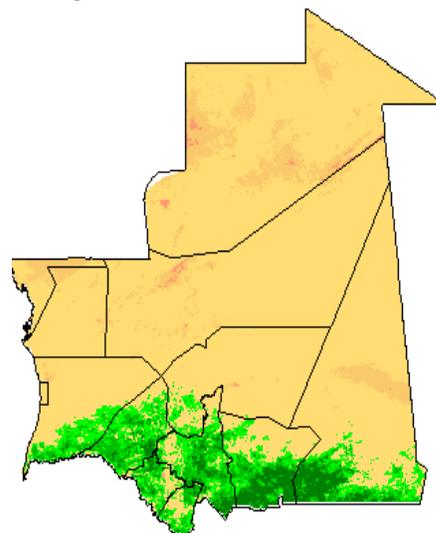
Source: FEWS NET

Flood-recession crops (*walo* and lowland crops and crops grown in dam areas): *Walo* crops are grown in the Senegal River Valley area, with other flood-recession crops grown all across the country. *Walo* areas normally flooded in July are still dry, but most interior lowland areas were completely filled with water well before late August, when rainfall activity is normally at its peak. Thus, there should be larger than usual viable interior lowland areas for planting. On the other hand, the later than usual rise in the river level in *walo* areas, which produce approximately 40 percent of all output in the Valley, could hurt crop performance due to the shortened flooding period, even if the size of cropped areas is not affected.

Irrigated crops: Irrigated farming schemes devoted mainly to rice cultivation are concentrated in the Senegal River Valley. As of mid-August, the size of the area planted in irrigated crops was below-average. Most large-scale collective irrigation schemes had not yet planted any crops and certain village cooperatives in Trarza, Brakna, Gorgol, and Guidimakha may reduce or cancel winter cropping if they are unable to obtain farm loans. Nevertheless, ongoing cropping activities in parts of the new irrigation schemes established by the government should put production levels for the winter growing season close to figures for 2012.

Pursuit of assistance programs (village-level food security stocks (SAVS), government-subsidized shops (BS), and therapeutic feeding centers (CRENAM)): The cyclical end of free food distributions by the WFP and CSA (the national Food Security Agency), ongoing since the beginning of the year, has had only a limited effect household food access among the poor, which has been bolstered by income from farm labor and the availability of staple foods sold by SAVS and BS programs at prices 30 to 40 percent below prices on formal markets. Food security among refugees in Mbera camp in the southeastern part of the country has improved. The latest count put the number of refugees at 75,000, whose needs will be more easily met as the relatively stable conditions in Mali cause many refugees to start returning to their homes. In addition, some of these refugees will be engaging in crop-farming and income-generating activities during the rainy season.

Figure 3 Vegetation index, first dekad of August 2013



Source: FEWS NET

Retail markets are well-stocked with imported food commodities and locally grown cereals, whose prices were relatively stable between July and August, though above seasonal averages. The exception is rainfed sorghum, whose prices have increased by 32 percent in agropastoral areas and 16 percent in southern oasis areas due to the heightened demand for seeds. Even with the celebration of the end of Ramadan, the only change in livestock prices between July and August was in northwestern agropastoral areas, where prices are 55 percent above the four-year average due to ongoing demand driven by efforts to rebuild livestock herds that have been significantly reduced by two years of drought.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

Food security indicators in all livelihood zones are consistent with the projected outlook for the period from July through December 2013, except in the north, where the late start of the rains has extended the lean season slightly for farming and pastoral households into August/September. If projected rainfall levels do not pan out before the first half of September, food insecurity is likely to deteriorate in pastoral areas beginning in October. A full discussion of this outlook can be found in the [Food Security Outlook for July through December 2013](#).

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH DECEMBER 2013

Current rainfall conditions in all livelihood zones are expected to improve between August and October, putting pastoral conditions and farming activities in line with the norm. This should generate moderately higher levels of seasonal farm income for poor households across the country and produce near-average grain harvests, resulting in Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) in all rural areas by September.