

Production deficits provoke population displacement

Following a late start and early cessation of rainfall, the 2009 agricultural season performed poorly overall. Between 20 and 30 percent of agricultural villages in the agro-pastoral and pastoral zones of the departments of Diffa, Tanout and Mirriah (the millet belt of Zinder region), and Gouré harvested nothing this year (Figure 1). In some of these villages, more than 30 percent of households left their homes in October for urban centers and areas of recession cropping in search of daily labor. The additional labor supply caused a decline in the daily wage of the urban workforce. Without food assistance in areas of origin, population movement to urban areas could intensify in March, contributing to the further degradation of urban food security. Above-normal food assistance is needed urgently to address food insecurity in these areas.

In the villages where the harvest did not occur, the proportion of purchased food in the diet will increase by more than 50 percent, while prices for millet and cowpea, the primary cereal and protein staples for the poor, are above the five-year average and rising abnormally.

The three main sources of income of the poor in this area (local labor, the sale of cash crops, and migration of able-bodied men to surplus cropping areas and abroad for work) are severely limited this year. The loss of production has reduced the demand for local labor, and the production of cash crops, both recessional (cowpea, maize, rice) and irrigated (pepper, garlic, onion, cassava), is much lower this year than normal because of the early withdrawal of Lake Chad and the Komadougou River. Many poor households with no production, anticipating that the intensification of normal labor migration would be insufficient to resolve the food gap, have left their homes for urban centers to join the households of the urban periphery in competition for small jobs. As a result, the daily wage of the urban workforce is declining. Since 2008 the average value per day of labor has been 1000 FCFA, but as of October it has fallen to between 750 and 850 CFA francs for construction and the sale of tap water, the most common work for the urban poor.

In the Diffa region in particular, nearly 90 percent of villages have lost more than 50 percent of their production of millet and sorghum. Remaining poor households have intensified the systematic collection of agricultural residues, straw and firewood. The poor season has contributed to both below-normal supply and above-normal demand for these products, for which prices are at least double those of last year at the same period. Revenues, therefore, are currently sufficient to meet food needs, but will decrease sharply as of January/February when supplies are exhausted. The intense exploitation of the environment also fosters the creation of sand dunes and degradation of arable land in the long term.

Major food and non-food assistance is needed urgently to improve the food security in areas of departure (i.e. affected cropping areas) until the next harvest in September 2010 and in host areas (i.e. urban migration destinations) until households return home in May/June 2010. The vulnerability survey conducted by the National Early Warning System and its partners in December will improve the identification and quantification of food insecure people. This more specific information is expected in January 2010.

Figure 1. Map of livelihoods zones and villages. Some agricultural villages in the red hatched area are affected by low production and population displacements.

