

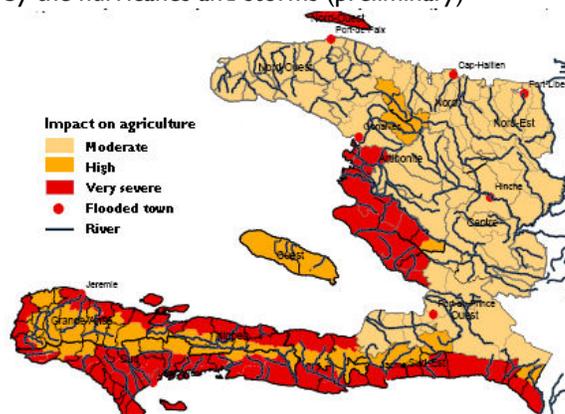
HAITI Food Security Update

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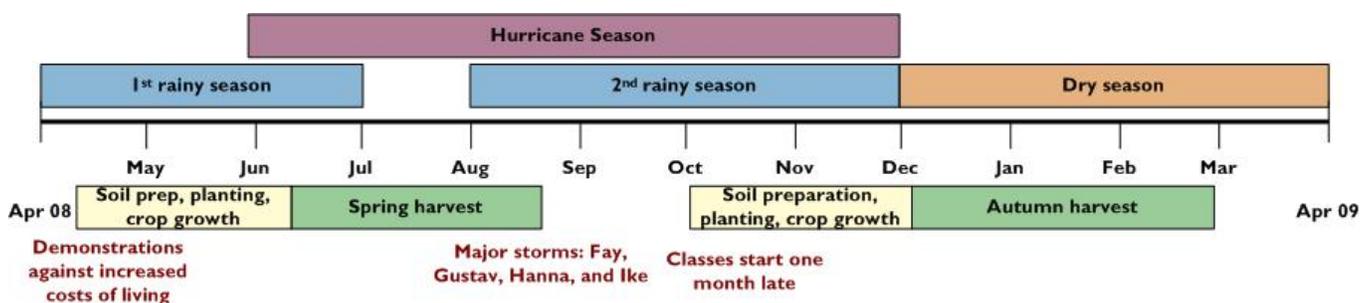
- Between August 15 and September 15, two tropical storms and two hurricanes struck Haiti, causing enormous damage due to high winds, overflowing rivers, and flooding. The departments most affected were Artibonite, the West, and the four departments on the southern peninsula (Figure 1). The storms killed at least 423 people, destroyed eight major bridges and more than 10,000 houses, led to the loss of land, crops and livestock, and damaged many potable water supply lines.
- Food security, which was already precarious due to the high price of staple foods, has deteriorated considerably since the storms. Currently, approximately three million people are food insecure, an increase of 20 percent in one month.
- National and international partners quickly mobilized to help victims and begin the most urgent repairs. Humanitarian organizations have coordinated their activities well, especially through “clusters” for sector-wide dialogue. Ideally, the emergency aid phase would extend until July 2009, when the first harvests not directly affected by the storms will take place. However, recent demobilization by various partners has been observed, even though economic and human recovery, and halting environmental degradation, are immediate, but long-term priorities. Affected areas will see a particularly difficult hunger season in November and December 2008.
- Given this situation, the following recommendations are made to the government and its national and international partners: 1) increase and better coordinate emergency response and rapid recovery activities in the areas most affected by higher staple food prices and the recent weather disasters; 2) develop and implement an extensive environmental restoration/protection and household vulnerability reduction program; and 3) improve risk and disaster management to improve response systems to major catastrophes.

Figure 1. Areas where agriculture was most affected by the hurricanes and storms (preliminary)



Source: MARNDR, CNSA, field partners

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: CNSA/FEWS NET Haiti

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Current food security conditions

Just when the beginning of the spring harvest (at the end of July) was expected to reduce food insecurity, the current food crisis (related to the high prices of staple foods on the international market) has worsened. Food insecurity particularly increased in September when the country's southern peninsula was hit by tropical storm Hanna (September 1-2) and hurricanes Gustav (August 26) and Ike (September 6-7) while the soil was still saturated by water from tropical storm Fay (August 15-16). Gustav was followed by tropical storm Hanna and hurricane Ike, which caused even more damage in the south (e.g., the towns of Les Cayes and Jacmel) and severe flooding in the rest of the country, especially in the departments of Artibonite (e.g., the towns of Gonaïves, Grande Saline and Saint Marc, as well as the valley's irrigated lands) and West (e.g., the town of Cabaret and Gonâve island). The departments of the Center (save for the towns of Hinche and Mirebalais), Northeast, North, and Northwest have been spared as of now, relatively speaking, and the agricultural season is proceeding fairly normally there. However, other storms are still possible, given that the hurricane season does not end until November 2008.

According to a preliminary report issued September 16, 2008 by the DPC [Office of Public Safety], Gonaïves recorded 194 deaths, or about half of the 423 deaths recorded in the entire country. In September 2004, tropical storm Jeanne left about 3,000 dead in the same town. Improved risk and disaster management (especially in terms of awareness raising and early warning) and lessons learned since that time significantly reduced the number of deaths. In contrast, observers noted much heavier material damage in 2008. While most bridges had fared well in previous years, at least eight major bridges were swept away by water in the second half of September 2008, meaning that many areas have temporarily had no access to emergency aid. There was also enormous damage to irrigation infrastructure, gravity-fed potable water lines, and other infrastructure and public-benefit facilities such as schools, hospitals, etc. The DPC estimates that 67,759 houses were completely destroyed or damaged. The total value of the damage comes to hundreds of millions of US dollars. These infrastructure, property, and physical facilities must be replaced or repaired as quickly as possible to reduce vulnerability and increase household resilience.

The hurricanes and tropical storms that arrived in quick succession in August and September aggravated the acute food crisis that has been affecting Haiti since the end of 2007, due mainly to the increase in staple food prices. This crisis had led to a series of responsive measures and activities (subsidies for rice, increased food aid in the most vulnerable areas, labor-intensive work, etc.) after violent demonstrations in the streets and the fall of the government in April 2008. The arrival of the storms in August and September 2008 has heightened this crisis. Despite the current difficulty estimating the number of people currently food insecure, due to insufficient relevant data (e.g., agricultural performance, child malnutrition rates, remittances), CNSA and FEWS NET estimate that about three million people are currently food insecure. This figure includes the 800,000 people directly affected by the storms. Prior to the hurricanes, the food insecure population was located especially in the semi-arid parts of Northwest, Northeast, Gonâve Island, and Grande-Anse. This population now includes rural areas and coastal villages in the South, Southeast, Nippes, and Artibonite departments.

The following sections of this document are a quick overview of the impact of last month's hurricanes and tropical storms on food insecurity as a function of food availability, food access, and the biological utilization of food.

Impact of floods on short-term food availability

The agricultural damage caused by the recent storms will reduce food production. For the short term, this means an increased dependence on commercial and non-commercial food imports. According to CNSA's food balance sheet for 2007, 48 percent of food needs are met by commercial imports, 47 percent by national production, and 5 percent by food aid.

In terms of agricultural losses, the August and September storms affected especially the plains, where all of the irrigation systems are found. The impact was more severe in the departments of Grande Anse, Nippes, South, Southeast, West (Arcahaie area), and Artibonite. The crops most affected were banana plants, rice, beans, and fruit trees. As access to all of these areas is difficult, estimating the percentage of the season's production losses is difficult, at both the national and local level. According to assessments by services and institutions working in the field, an estimated 63,777 hectares of land planted in crops have been affected (Table 1). Given that the total cultivated area in the country is approximately one million hectares, the damaged and lost lands correspond to about six percent of the total planted area. However, most of the affected lands – some of which have been permanently lost – are on the alluvial plains along the rivers and have the highest agricultural production in the country. At the local level, some crops (especially along riverbanks in coastal areas)

were completely devastated and it will not always be possible to replant and harvest at the end of the season as planned. This is the case for beans in the non-irrigated zones of the southern peninsula.

Table 1. Preliminary estimate of agricultural losses caused by the mid-August to mid-September 2008 storms

DEPARTMENT	AGRICULTURE			LIVESTOCK		FISHING	IRRIGATION SYSTEMS AND ROADS	ESTIMATED TOTAL VALUE (\$000)
	Affected area (ha)	Loss	Est. value (\$000)	No. of livestock killed or lost (head)	Est. value (\$000)	Est. value (\$000)	Est. value (\$000)	
ARTIBONITE	20,400	32%	1,000	1,897	139		1,370	2,510
WEST	10,650	17%	0	13,400	0	385	472	857
NIPPES	4,634	7%	0	4,595	211		103	314
NORTH	13,373	21%	14,980	7,178	723		256	15,958
NORTHEAST	1,985	3%	9,021	571	48		94	9,163
NORTHWEST	1,051		2,628	3,197	0	17,500	176	20,304
SOUTH	6,125	10%	0	920	900		590	1,490
SOUTHEAST	2,390	4%	1,022	58,617	2,382	42	865	4,311
GRAND ANSE	2,695	4%	4,717	673	50	50	75	4,893
CENTER	1,025	2%	1,016	408	66	-	293	1,375
TOTAL	64,328	98%	34,383	91,456	4,520	17,976	4,293	61,173

Source: MARNDR Departmental Offices

Information not yet available	-	Not applicable
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Concerning crop damage in the most greatly affected areas, an estimated 4,481 hectares of banana plants were damaged, out of a total of 20,000 hectares planted in bananas. Consequently, short-term production losses can be estimated at nearly a fifth of national production. Rice crops suffered greatly in the Artibonite valley, but the final outcome of the season will depend on how quickly irrigation infrastructure can be repaired, especially in Artibonite. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates the cost of repairing this infrastructure at about five million US dollars. Rice production will be significantly lower than expected figures because most of the fertilizers spread in August have been washed away by the floods. Domestic rice production currently covers about a quarter of Haiti's needs. In the end, it will be the country's ability to import and the prices on the international market (which at the moment are falling) that will be the most important factors determining supply. Fruit and bean losses were enormous on the South Peninsula, a large production zone, but relatively light elsewhere. Given such indications, it is still too early to project final results of the agricultural season at the national level. Until now, crops that did not suffer greatly from the hurricanes or flooding, such as roots and tubers, have benefited from the heavy rains during this early part of the winter season. Products from the coming harvest, which normally would arrive in December 2008, would in principle be consumed until about July 2009. At that time, there will be another harvest and people will begin eating food grown during the season not directly affected by the recent weather. The normal lean period in November and December 2008, which would have occurred even without the hurricanes and tropical storms, will be particularly difficult in the affected areas. Accordingly, increased food aid should be scheduled during this period.

The storms caused the loss of many heads of livestock. The MARNDR [Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development] estimates losses of over 100,000, out of a total national population of 3.5 million. This corresponds to about three percent of the total number. Initial estimates set the value of livestock losses at five million US dollars. Given these losses, a rapid recapitalization program in the livestock sector is advised, given their importance as an income and savings source. For many rural families, they provide better access to food, medical care, and/or school for their children.

The total cost of agricultural damage (to crops, livestock, and agricultural infrastructure) reported by the decentralized agricultural services is initially estimated at 61 million US dollars (Table 1). This is four percent of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) of about 1.5 billion US dollars for fiscal year 2006-07 (source: UNDP), or one percent of GDP.

Impact of floods on the environment and long-term agricultural production

Unpredictable weather in August and September resulted in the deterioration of ecosystems (e.g., pollution of wet areas,

deterioration of watersheds, deposit of alluvium and colluvium on cultivated areas, reduction in biodiversity, increase in plant diseases, etc.) and a reduction in environmentally friendly services (e.g., natural fertilization, natural pest control, pollination, etc.). This has severely affected current and future agricultural production by reducing soil permeability and reducing the area under cultivation, exacerbated by problems with the water cycle (e.g., difficulty of recharging aquifers, blocked irrigation systems, etc.).

Since Haiti was already highly vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms before the latest series of disasters, the unusually heavy rains of recent weeks have stripped the fine layer of arable soil on the mountainsides much more than usual, deepened the ravines and carried away hundreds, if not thousands, of hectares. They also destroyed many houses along the rivers, especially near the river mouths, and dumped rocks onto the alluvial soils of the plains.

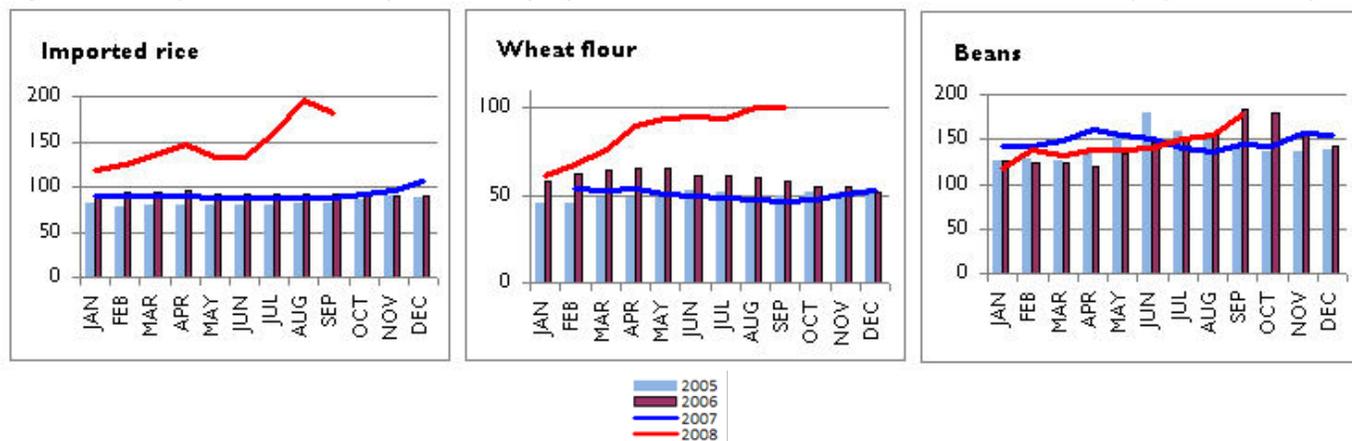
The silting of the rivers, irrigation canals and lakes, and the mud that filled the houses and streets in the flooded towns, are evidence of the huge loss of the arable layer of soil on the mountains. Experts estimate that three million cubic meters of mud were deposited in Gonaïves alone, and it will take several months of cleanup to remove it completely. An ambitious, sustained, environmental protection program (including erosion prevention and reforestation) is more urgent than ever to slow the deterioration of the environment and reinforce the population’s resiliency in the face of extreme weather systems and other serious disruptions. As a result, in addition to the financial resources and national and international expertise mobilized for the emergency response, many more resources must be retained for the long term to stop the continuous environmental deterioration and reduce household vulnerability.

Impact of floods on food access

Most households, including rural households, depend on food purchased at the market for their diet. Accordingly, monetary income and the prices of staple foods (along with the prices of other essential goods and services such as housing, education, health care, and transportation) play a crucial role in the country’s food security. After the floods, the prices of food and other goods such as fuel increased greatly in the affected areas due to collapsing bridges and landslides on the roads, which made these areas difficult to supply. This situation is not without repercussions for income, prices for food and other goods, and essential services. While rice prices in Port au Prince and Jacmel were about equal before the storms, prices in Jacmel rose by about 30 percent afterwards. Differences relative to Port au Prince were just as significant for other towns that were cut off from Port au Prince, such as Les Cayes and Gonaïves. As the country’s main transportation routes gradually reopen thanks to the combined efforts of the Ministry of Public Works and international aid, and emergency food aid begins to arrive, price differences are gradually returning to normal.

International prices for staples such as rice, maize, and wheat are gradually falling but remain relatively high. Local markets are beginning to reflect the decrease (Figure 2). However, prices remain higher than in April, when the last street demonstrations against the rising cost of living took place. Unfortunately, the inflation rate has increased again in the last few months, reaching 18.8 percent in August. This makes the cost of living even higher, just as school is starting again after the government mandated a one-month delay to repair damaged schools and find housing for families temporarily sheltered in them. The first day of school, set for October 6, brings high costs for schooling and transportation and means

Figure 2. Change in nominal retail prices for staple products, Crois de Bossales market, Port au Prince (in gourdes/6 lbs.)



Source: CNSA/FEWS NET Haiti

that households must spend even more. Poor families may, as they usually do, keep their children at home until the January term. This would deprive these pupils of the instruction given in the first quarter and the meals furnished by school cafeterias, which are available in all of the vulnerable areas.

The other component of food access, monetary income, has declined considerably in the affected areas. In flooded Gonaïves, families have lost everything (e.g., food stored in their houses, clothing, household furnishings, etc.). People who had a profession (small or large shops, workshops, liberal professions) will not be able to recover quickly without significant outside support (e.g., recapitalization of the means of subsistence, in particular by granting credit). Not only have these people lost their livelihoods, but all of the people that depend on them as well. That said, current humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable people – consisting essentially of food and non-food aid – will not be sufficient to ensure essential goods and services, previously furnished largely by the private sector, for the short and medium term.

If economic and social conditions are not restored quickly, some households will decide to move to towns that are better off, such as Port au Prince. This will put greater pressure on already inadequate public services in the metropolitan area. The loss of traditional income sources for unskilled workers is partially compensated by the labor-intensive work of cleaning up the flooded towns, cleaning out rivers and canals, and repairing breaches in the banks, which has just begun. However, supplemental programs such as the granting of low-interest loans to merchants must quickly be designed and implemented to allow rapid restoration of the social and economic fabric of the affected areas.

Impact of floods on the biological utilization of food

Following the floods and the destruction and contamination of potable water supply lines, problems with diarrhea were reported in the most heavily affected towns, especially Les Cayes. Many cases of skin infections were also reported in the temporary shelters, and experts fear that the number of malaria cases will rise in the coming days. The consequences of this, should it occur, would be increased health care expenses, an inability of active household members to work and, for all residents of the affected areas, poor utilization of the food eaten. As a result, malnutrition rates would increase. Data concerning malnutrition, especially child malnutrition, are not highly centralized or easily accessible. According to key informants, rates of severe acute malnutrition for children under the age of five years have risen in the southern coastal area from 1-1.5 percent before the hurricanes to three percent or more two weeks after the hurricanes. Meanwhile, malnutrition in some poor working-class neighborhoods in the Port au Prince metropolitan area, such as Saint Martin and Martissant, is said to be even worse than in rural areas. In these neighborhoods, severe acute malnutrition rates were already exceeding alarming figures, for example, 2.5 percent in June 2008.

Survival strategies and emergency response

The means of subsistence for people who were already food insecure, and who are located mainly in rural areas, have deteriorated due to the loss of livestock and difficult access to areas such as Artibonite (which itself is now among the most heavily damaged locations), which traditionally attracted migrant workers from areas that were less well off. It is to be feared that the use of very harmful survival strategies, such as cutting wood to make charcoal, will increase. The towns with the worst flooding, especially Gonaïves, have so much damage that residents can no longer exercise their respective professions and no longer have much leeway in terms of survival strategies. There is an obvious risk that the most affected populations will try to migrate toward the urban area, which is relatively better off; this would saturate the existing public services even more and, in the medium term, could cause a return of civil unrest.

Many victims of the recent weather events are now surviving only because of food and non-food aid. The United Nations agencies, NGOs, government, community-based organizations, and unaffected family members, including those living abroad, are doing their best to help the victims. However, according to the UNDP, as of September 30, the appeal for emergency aid for Haiti had received only about 20 percent of the 108 million US dollars needed. In addition, October and November constitute a difficult lean period for rural households. Moreover, this year, October will be a difficult month with the start of school and costs that it brings. Increased food aid must therefore be scheduled, especially from November 2008 until July 2009, the month when the first harvest not directly affected by the current hurricane season should arrive.

It is appropriate to note the effective coordination that exists among the international humanitarian agencies, in particular through their coordination meetings or “clusters.” At the same time, even better results could be achieved if the government were to participate. Moreover, the end of the emergency aid phase is revealing a tendency for the

international community to demobilize, just when the various partners should remain strongly committed to helping with a quick economic and human recovery for the country and to stopping the deterioration of the environment and of the population's resiliency.

Recommendations

Given the recent deterioration of current and chronic food security in Haiti, the following recommendations are made to the government, donors, community-based organizations and others working in the field:

1. Supplement and intensify activities in response to the food crises that were already underway, including through the acceleration of irrigation infrastructure repairs, to get the winter season underway again, and the recapitalization of farming and non-farming operations.
2. Develop a program of environmental restoration/protection and vulnerability reduction by strengthening the appropriate elements contained in existing strategies. This program would include the following elements: 1) repairing physical infrastructure damaged by the floods; 2) recapitalizing operations, especially by replacing lost livestock; 3) increasing agricultural productivity; 4) protecting watersheds via reforestation, remediation of ravines and riverbanks, erosion prevention, etc.; 5) relocation of dwellings and town neighborhoods to areas less prone to flooding; 6) promoting investment in various growth sectors of the economy; 7) expanding activities likely to alleviate chronic malnutrition; and, 8) improving the coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of development programs and crisis response operations.
3. Further improve risk and disaster management in order to better respond to major catastrophes.

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