FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Above-average “2020B” season crop production reflecting abundant seasonal rains
- Localized production shortfalls of pulses expected due to excessive moisture
- Above-average aggregate cereal production expected in 2020 following above-average “2020A” and “2020B” season harvests
- Prices of cereals stable at low levels reflecting adequate domestic availabilities
- Food security substantially improving due to above-average “2020B” season harvest, despite livelihood losses caused by COVID-19-related restrictions and localized floods in April

Above-average “2020B” season crop production reflecting abundant rains

Harvesting of the “2020B” main season crops, accounting for about 50 percent of the yearly crop output, was completed in July. The February-May “long-rains” season was characterized by a timely onset and by abundant precipitation amounts, especially in April, when cumulative rains were between twice and three times the long-term average. The rainy season had an earlier-than-usual cessation around mid-May, but it did not affect vegetation conditions due to the substantial moisture surpluses accumulated during the season.

The abundant seasonal precipitation was beneficial for crop establishment, development and yields, with no significant drought stress registered as of the end of May, immediately before the start of the harvest in June (see ASI image). Thus, crop production is estimated at above-average levels, driven by ample harvests of cereals, tubers and bananas, despite some localized production shortfalls of pulses due to excessive moisture.

The torrential rains in April triggered flooding and landslides in several areas, mainly in western in Cibitoke, Bubanza, Rumonge, Bujumbura Mairie and Bujumbura Rural provinces, affecting about 45 000 people and resulting in displacements, loss of lives and damage to infrastructures. However, crop losses, estimated, at about 1 500 hectares, were minimal, amounting to less than 1 percent of the “B” season area planted in recent years.
Above-average aggregate cereal production expected in 2020

Harvesting of the “2020A” season crops, representing about 35 percent of the yearly crop production, was concluded in February. The September-December 2019 “short-rains” season was characterized by well above-average rainfall amounts, with cumulative seasonal precipitation estimated at up to twice the long-term average. The heavy seasonal rains boosted yields, and crop production was estimated at above-average levels.

The harvest of the minor “2020C” season crops, accounting for about 15 percent of the yearly crop production, will start in September in marshlands and irrigated areas. Although the latest Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) weather forecast pointed to an above-average precipitation between June and September, the rains in June and July were below average. However, as the abundant February-May rains adequately recharged water sources, vegetation conditions in July were favourable over most cropping areas (see Vegetation Condition Index image) and an above-average crop production is expected.

As a result, the 2020 aggregate cereal production is tentatively forecast at almost 360,000 tonnes, about 5 percent up from 2019 and about 13 percent above the average of the previous five years.

Prices of maize stable at low levels

Prices of maize declined by 40-45 percent between December 2019 and April 2020 in all monitored markets including the capital, Bujumbura, as newly harvested crops from the “2020A” above-average harvest increased supplies. Subsequently, prices remained mostly stable between April and July around their year-earlier levels, due to adequate domestic availabilities.

Food security conditions improving following above-average “2020B” harvest

According to the latest IPC analysis, about 859,000 people (8 percent of the analysed population) are estimated to be severely food insecure (IPC Phase 3: “Crisis” and Phase 4: “Emergency”) in the period June-August 2020. This figure, which includes 817,000 people in IPC Phase 3 and 42,000 people in IPC Phase 4, is about 40 percent down from the estimate of 1,444 million people in May 2020. The substantial improvement of the food security situation is the result of the above-average “2020B” season harvest, which substantially increased food availability and improved access. These positive factors offset the livelihood losses caused by floods and landslides and the negative impact on wage rates, labour opportunities and remittances on cross-border trade of agricultural produce of restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Box below).

The current food insecure caseload is the lowest on record since 2017, mainly due to the introduction of social safety net programmes and agricultural production promotion programmes through subsidized sales of fertilizers and improved seeds. However, the food security situation of the country is structurally fragile due to high population density, land degradation, recurrent natural disasters and high poverty rates, with more than

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burundi</th>
<th>Cereal Production</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>000 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice (paddy)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>318</td>
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Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.
40 percent of households estimated to suffer from poverty in early 2019. Against this backdrop, the persisting negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious risk to the country’s food security. To mitigate these impacts, FAO has launched the Revised humanitarian response Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), May–December 2020, aiming to assist about 865 000 beneficiaries with agricultural input distributions, livestock support, cash transfers and income-generating activities.

Since civil unrest erupted in April/May 2015, thousands of Burundians fled their homes. As of late June 2020, about 334 000 refugees still sheltered in neighbouring countries, mainly in the United Republic of Tanzania as well as in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since late September 2017, an influx of returnees has started and, as of late June 2020, about 80 000 people returned to the country with the support of the humanitarian community. Similarly, the number of IDPs declined from 190 000 to 103 000 between November 2017 and November 2019. However, the number of IDPs increased again to 137 000 in June 2020 following floods and landslides during both the 2019 September–December and the 2020 February–March rainy seasons. Despite the recent improvements, the food security situation of most of the displaced is still precarious and they mainly depend on community support and food assistance.

Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fleeing conflict in the Grand Kivu Region and estimated in late June at about 78 000 people, also face food insecurity, as they have limited livelihood opportunities and mainly rely on humanitarian assistance.

COVID-19 and measures adopted by the Government
The Government of Burundi introduced, since March 2020, some precautionary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the adoption of social distancing measures; the recommendation of frequent handwashing; the installation of hand sanitizers and water for handwashing in public places; the suspension of all flights, except for cargo, humanitarian, emergency and diplomatic flights and the introduction of screening and quarantine measures at land border entries with Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania.

To mitigate the economic impact of these measures, the Government has implemented some fiscal measures, mainly to support the hard-hit sectors, including transport and tourism, through a tax amnesty for hotels and industries that will not be able to pay them; subsidies to help pay salaries avoiding massive layoffs and the payment by the Government of salaries for suspended services such as those provided at the Bujumbura International Airport.

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