



Information and Alert note – October 10th, 2017

Concerning situation in Northern Senegal

This note is based on Climate Monitoring data and analysis of Action Against Hunger West Africa Regional Office, GTP meeting reports and newsletter from Podor, and information collected by Action Against Hunger and its partners RBM and ADENA on the field.

This note shall be updated and extended to other areas, including cross-borders, depending on evolution of the situation

While the rainy season is nearing its end, the low amount of fallen rain raises fears for the upcoming challenges faced by farmers and breeders as the situation can be compared to the drought of 2011. Food and nutritional security of the households and communities living in Podor, Matam and Louga is at high risk.

Following the droughts in 2011 and 2014, this would be the third episode in 6 years, if confirmed. Such frequency is extremely rare.

Rainfall deficit and abnormal biomass production

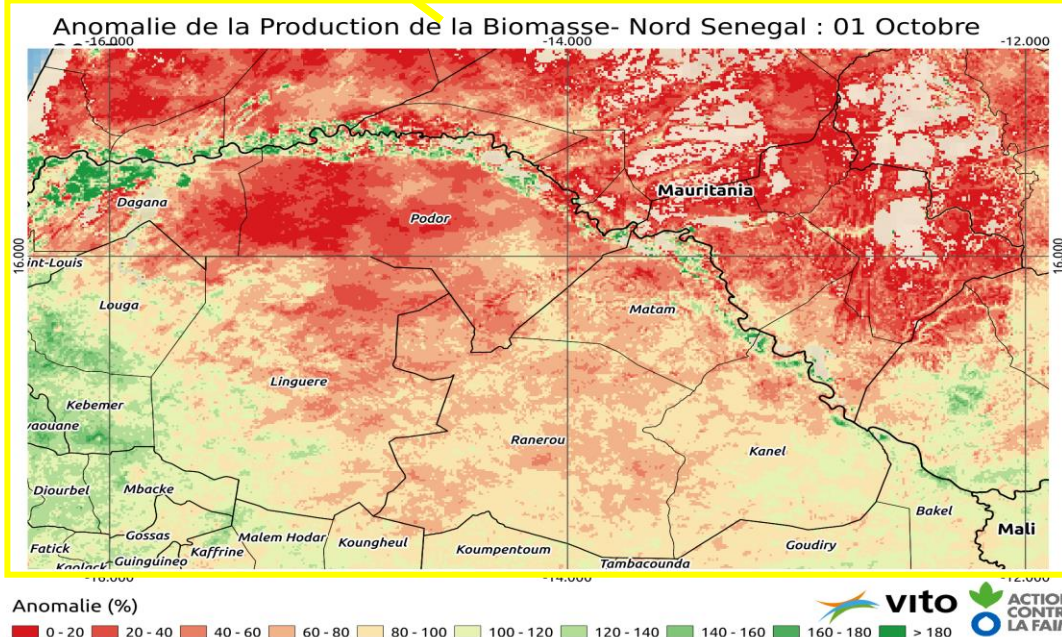
According to the rainfall data available to the Podor Department on September 25th, 2017 at 8:00 am, seasonal accumulations are deficient compared to the same date on 2016.

Stations	Total 2017		Total 2016		(Total 2017 – Total 2016)	
	H (mm)	days	H (mm)	days	H (mm)	days
Podor	137,4	17	199,3	17	- 61,9	=
Ndioum	180,3	16	232,4	14	- 52,1	+ 2
Aéré lao	214,7	12	273,3	12	- 58,6	=
Galoya	218,7	16	325,5	21	- 106,8	- 5

These rainfall data corroborate the biomass production analysis carried out by Action Against Hunger on October 1st, 2017. The data indicate that the biomass production situation in Northern Senegal, particularly on the *Ferlo*, is alarming. Moreover, the pastures in the area encompassing Podor and Linguère, usually very productive, do not even reach 50% of the average production expected for this period and will not reach the minimum level needed in order to adequately feed the livestock present in the area.

The data revealed a strong negative anomaly (i.e. production well below the long-term average calculated between 1998 and 2017) in the departments of Matam, Podor, Linguère and Ranerou.. The anomaly is marked in red in the map below.

Anomalie de la Production de la Biomasse au Sahel: 01 Octobre 2017



Source – Action Contre la Faim - GeoSahel – Bureau Régional WARO Dakar

Situation by Sector

Agriculture

The rain-fed crop production this year is not expected to give good results due to rain scarcity, irregularity and the shortness of the rainy season, which did not allow certain crops to complete their cycles. In particular, the production of millet, the dominant crop of families without access to the *Walo*, is going to be very impacted. Usually, the production obtained during this season is sufficient for a few weeks stock, but it will be much reduced this year.

Furthermore, the practice of flood recession crops (such as sorghum and maize) will be significantly reduced because of the low water level of the river Senegal. Although the Diama and Manantali dams contribute to controlling the water level in the Senegal River valley, a poor rainy season in western Mali, northern Senegal and southern Mauritania will lead to a very small river overflow and reduced flood recession crop production. Indeed, it is generally the flood-recession crops that allow the populations of the valley to reduce the negative impact of a sub-optimal rain-fed crop season.

Finally, the delay and inconsistencies of the rainy season were discouraging for some farmers. This is noticeable in the household plots where the crops grown in association are usually cowpeas and watermelons. Cowpea crops are at an early stage of development in plots in the *Diéri* with small surface area. Again, these plots normally play a very important role for families who do not have access to irrigated plots, by substantially improving a family's food supply. The low production of the household plot will surely contribute to increased food insecurity for poor families in these areas. As a reminder, in the course of food aid (cash transfer) operations carried out in 2015 and 2016 in Matam, almost 60% of families were classified as poor or very poor.

Livestock

The scarce vegetation growth translates into a fine mat of grass very close to the ground "*whereas in the same period, in the past, it reached the knees*" explains Mustafa Dia, Director of ADENA.

While they were thinking of returning home to the *Ferlo* in Podor, Matam and Linguère, so as to take advantage of the fresh pastures expected to result from the rainy season, many breeders have already resumed an early transhumance. Those who remained are benefitting from the residual pasture (the last showers have grown the *Zornia glochidiata*, a very palatable vegetable, but it will soon disappear). They all plan to leave in a few days or weeks. Men will take large ruminants to plains where herbaceous fodder will be available. Women, meanwhile, would remain in the villages taking care of children, with small ruminants as their main resource. Unfortunately, reports of the veterinary technical services indicate the surge of an epidemic marked by the appearance of the DNCB and the ovine pasteurellosis, further complicating the situation.



Pastoral zone of Yawara, Gamadji Saré, on September 17, 2017

Nutrition

Northern Senegal (Matam, Podor, Louga) is the most nutrition insecure area of the country, particularly with regards to acute undernutrition. Since the drought of 2011, the region has been facing a nutrition crisis with a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence >15% (threshold of crisis situation according to WHO).

Currently, the Medical Regions affected by the situation (St Louis, Matam, Louga) are finalizing and beginning to implement their nutritional contingency plans, allowing them to adapt to the seasonal needs (peak of Severe Acute Malnutrition).

Nevertheless, the local health system has demonstrated to dispose of a low level of preparedness and weak contingency plans to face health crisis of this proportion (acute under-nutrition, ARI, malaria). In addition to low health resilience, some structural constraints, such as geographical and financial barriers to access health services in this extended area, are affecting the nutrition security of the communities.

The situation is currently being followed by local authorities. Since August, the department of Podor has activated a Pluri-disciplinary Task Force with institutional technical departments and NGOs. In Matam, the Governor's office held a special meeting (Regional Committee for Development) dedicated to the rain deficit situation with its local technical agencies.

Perspectives

Food Security

Two important aspects have to be taken into account in measuring the potential impact of the current situation on food security: a pastoral environment already very fragile and the frequency of climatic shocks that erode the resilience of populations.

First, as an immediate consequence, the lack of pasture this year will impact milk and meat production of herd of livestock. Moreover, the health of the livestock also affects their breeding capacity, thus the potential milk and meat production of the following season (2018). Indeed, the impact of a pastoral crisis can have repercussions felt for several years.

Second, the frequency of climatic shocks in these 4 departments (Matam, Ranérou, Podor and Linguère) and the relative weakness of the response system in accompanying the vulnerable populations of these departments, makes the local communities more and more fragile over time. The HEA profiles of the Matam area show that in less than 10 years the very poor and poor came to make up more than half of the population, when they accounted for only one third in 2011.

This leads the crisis to take on a regional proportion because of the cross-border movement of pastoralists. The Mauritanian herds, which usually transhumate towards Senegal or Mali, will find very degraded pastoral areas.

Nutrition

The Ministry of Health and Social Action plans to carry out a nutrition survey (SMART) in these areas in the near future in order to assess the situation. It is to be noted that following years of similar climatic events (2011, 2014), acute malnutrition outbreaks were recorded due to erosive coping mechanism affecting dietary practices, as it was observed in the past (for example reduction of number and quality of meals)

In 2016-2017, a cross-border causal analysis of undernutrition (LinkNCA) in Matam (Senegal) and Gorgol (Mauritania) has shown the incidence of many climate-related drivers such as level of food

production, access to drinking water and presence of local preparedness and response plan to mitigate the effect of the drought on household nutrition security.

As a consequence, it is expected that an early lean season will trigger an early and sustained peak of acute undernutrition (March-April) overwhelming national and local capacities. In parallel, potential withdrawal of international humanitarian organizations and donors bringing technical, operational and financial support to the health system in 2018 could contribute to increasing undernutrition-derived morbidity and mortality rates for children under five and pregnant and lactating women.

Actions and recommendations

- ⇒ Monitor the evolving situation closely, particularly with regards to agriculture, livestock and nutrition.
- ⇒ Establish contingencies to support the agricultural season and pastoral activity to reduce the risk of losses.
- ⇒ Prepare in advance food security support plans for the 2018 lean period, which should be early (March-April).
- ⇒ Strengthen the capacity of the health system to respond adequately to the anticipated outbreak of severe acute malnutrition expected in 2018.
- ⇒ Implement Cross-border approach shared by Senegal and Mauritania to combine and mutually reinforce responses, taking into account the regional dimension of the situation.
- ⇒ Enhance national capacities in terms of Food Security and Nutrition integrated early warning system.