



RPCA Policy Brief

COVID-19 risks overshadowing and compounding the severe food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel and West Africa. Several tens of millions of people are threatened. The region's stability could be at risk.

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The CILSS Executive Secretariat and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) produced this policy brief. It draws on the conclusions of the annual and restricted Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) meetings, held respectively on 9 December 2019 in Paris and on 2 April 2020 via videoconference.

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KEY MESSAGES

MESSAGE 1: The region is facing multiple threats simultaneously affecting the food and nutrition security of the most vulnerable populations.

- ▶ The agro-pastoral campaign was good overall with cereal production at 74 million tonnes, up by 12% compared to the five-year average. However, significant decreases were recorded in Cabo Verde (-80%), The Gambia (-47%), Sierra Leone (-15%) and Niger (-6%). The pastoral situation is difficult due to significant fodder shortages (Mauritania, Niger and Senegal), restricted cross-border transhumance in some countries, as well as reduced access to pastures due to the security crisis. Food markets are already experiencing an upward trend in prices, which could accelerate due to measures taken to fight COVID-19.
- ▶ **A desert locust outbreak threatens the region.** The consequences, coupled with those of the armyworm infestation, could compromise future harvests and the availability of pastures for livestock.
- ▶ **The economic environment is deteriorating** due to multiple factors. Inflation and local currency depreciation severely affect households' access to food and nutrition in The Gambia and Guinea, and more particularly, in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The rapid decline in cotton prices and the risk of them collapsing due to COVID-19, could lead to disastrous consequences for local economies in producing countries, weakening households' income and livelihoods. Measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (closure of non-essential businesses, movement restrictions) exacerbate the existing, fragile economic climate.
- ▶ **Civil insecurity persists** in the Lake Chad basin, the Liptako-Gourma region as well as in northern and northwestern Nigeria. This has led to large numbers of displaced people, the closure of many schools and health centres, disruptions to markets, as well as reduced access to farmland and pastures. In the affected countries, budget trade-offs between security, health and food emergencies are increasingly difficult, if not impossible.



ABOUT

Created in 1984 and under the political leadership of ECOWAS and UEMOA, the RPCA's objective is to build a consensual view of the food and nutrition situation and promote dialogue and co-ordination to facilitate decision-making and the effectiveness of interventions. It is co-facilitated by CILSS and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD).

MESSAGE 2: COVID-19 overshadows a major food and nutrition crisis currently ravaging the region and for which urgent action is required.

- ▶ While governments develop strategies and mobilise resources to fight COVID-19, 17 million people, of which 7 million in Nigeria alone, require urgent food and nutrition assistance. More than 1 million are in an emergency situation. If appropriate measures are not taken immediately, the combined effects of the security and health crises could tip more than 51 million additional people into a food crisis between now and the lean season.
- ▶ The countries most affected by the economic crisis also deserve political attention, particularly, Sierra Leone, which for the first time, recorded nearly 1.3 million people in food and nutrition insecurity.
- ▶ Despite efforts from States, acute malnutrition persists with almost 2.5 million children under 5 years of age affected in the Sahel. This situation could quickly deteriorate with the closure of schools and health centres due to the security and health crises.
- ▶ National response plans for food crises lack financing from one year to the next. Barely 50% of the required financing was mobilised in 2019. The situation in 2020 requires strong political commitment and more substantial funding.

MESSAGE 3: Public health measures related to COVID-19 could significantly exacerbate the food and nutrition crisis.

The health crisis has significant effects on food and nutrition security, namely:

In the short term:

- ▶ A collapse of local food supply systems, particularly agricultural production and food products during the current agro-pastoral campaign due to difficulties accessing key production resources (seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, credit and agricultural advice, etc.);
- ▶ Higher unemployment, loss of incomes including for producers lacking access to markets to sell their products, as well as deteriorating purchasing power and a lack of access to food by consumers, especially for those in the informal economy, hard hit by movement restrictions and the closure of markets.

In the medium to long term:

- ▶ Increased dependence on non-African imports due to a collapse in local food systems;
- ▶ Sudden price spikes in imported food products due to major disruptions in international markets similar to during the 2008 crisis.

MESSAGE 4: Urgent action is required building on innovative, forward-looking, flexible and co-ordinated approaches drawing on the strong leadership of ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS.

In this respect, regional organisations need to:

- ▶ Trigger emergency mechanisms in order to immediately provide assistance to populations currently in a food crisis and put in place monitoring and mitigation measures to prevent more than 50 million additional people from falling into a crisis;
- ▶ Start implementing ambitious programmes to curb the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition security:
 - Safeguard and strengthen food supply chains, including the cross-border movement of food products; local food supplies (e.g. shops with referenced food prices) for the benefit of vulnerable consumers;
 - Strengthen the purchasing power and livelihoods of vulnerable households through the expansion of social protection programmes;
 - Put in place measures to secure and support the current agro-pastoral campaign (access to inputs, credit, agricultural advice), as well as for processing and distribution chains;
 - Prepare the development and financing of stimulus packages for agri-food systems.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOWAS, UEMOA AND CILSS

In light of the severe food and nutrition crisis:

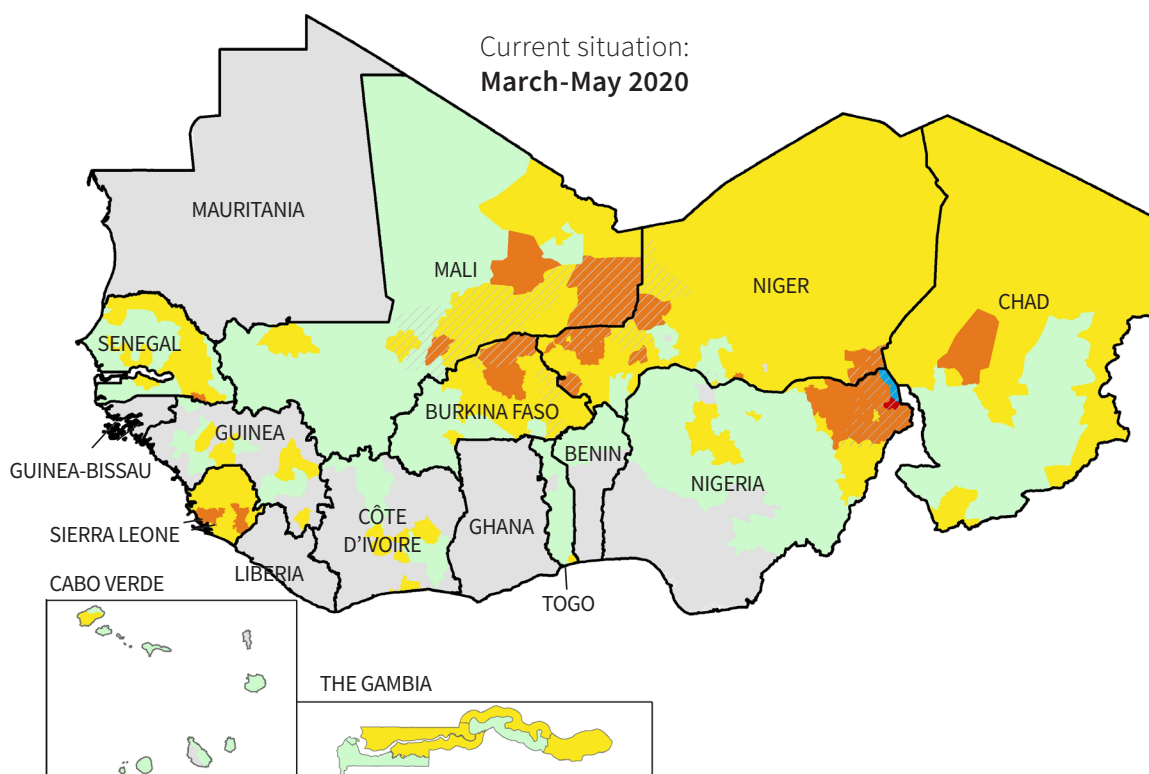
1. Take swift political and financial measures to support:
 - ▶ The implementation of national response plans to the food and nutrition crisis developed by the countries;
 - ▶ The ongoing agro-pastoral campaign, including support to States to monitor and anticipate initiatives in the face of the locust threat.
2. Initiate and strengthen instruments for co-ordination and alignment of interventions at regional and country level in order to create synergy across various initiatives, and ensure greater efficiency and impact. Organise as soon as possible an initial consultation with partners in the region.
3. Take the necessary steps with States, to accelerate the implementation of the [Banjul Declaration on Nutrition](#), including through increased commitments for preventive measures to reverse the negative and devastating nutritional trends.

In light of the expected consequences of COVID-19 on agri-food systems and food & nutrition security:

1. Support States in setting up national systems to monitor and assess the consequences of COVID-19 on food and nutrition security, following the example of the *Regional Task Force* resulting from the ministerial consultation of 31 March 2020;
2. Support country preparedness efforts to design and implement strategies to revive agri-food systems, including within the collection, processing and distribution segments.

SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA: FOOD AND NUTRITION SITUATION

11.4 million people in “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)

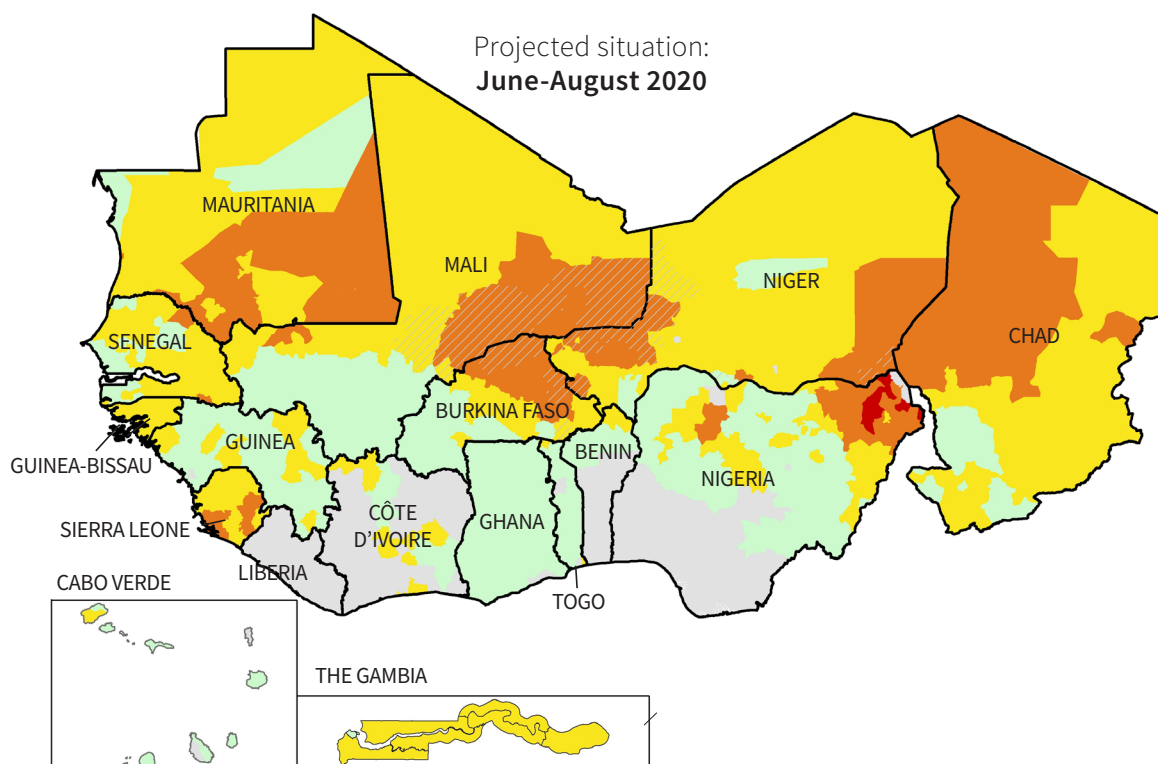


Phases of food insecurity

Partially inaccessible zones Not analysed

Phase 1: Minimal Phase 2: Stressed Phase 3: Crisis Phase 4: Emergency Phase 5: Famine

17 million people expected to face “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)



Source: Cadre harmonisé analyses, regional concertation meeting, Niamey, Niger, March 2020

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