

CHAD Food Security Alert

September 9, 2008

Floods, soaring prices in Moyen Chari region

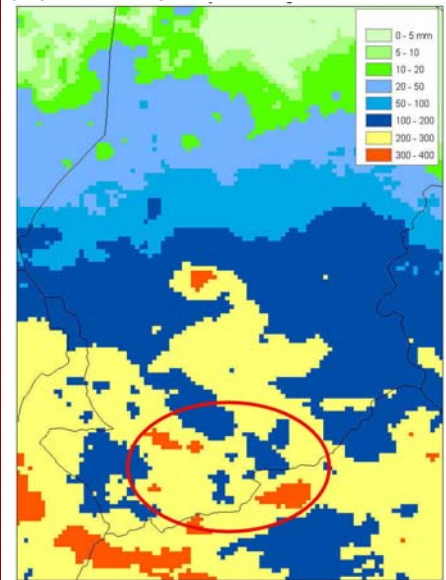
Heavy rains in late July and early August caused severe flooding in southern Chad, increasing already moderate levels of food insecurity in Moyen Chari region (Figure 1). The floods affected 30,000 people, 10,000 of whom lost their homes and possessions. Affected households are now facing difficult access to food, water, sanitation, and health care, and are exposed to respiratory infections, malaria, and other diarrheal diseases. Due to the damage caused by the flooding, including reduced access to food and markets, high prices for cereals have increased even further. Given that access to food products on the market is difficult because of ongoing heavy rains, forecast to continue through September in the Sarh area, and that food reserves from cereal crops and cash crops (e.g., cotton, ground nuts, cowpeas) have already largely been exhausted, emergency food and non-food assistance is needed until the peak of the next harvest in October, and into the off-season in some areas.

Although the loss of shelter, possessions, and market access, as well as the increased risk of water-borne diseases and other infections, require immediate attention, the floods have also exacerbated already high prices for staple foods. In Sarh, an important cereals market in the area, a kilogram of pearl millet traded for 125 CFA francs in August 2007 now costs 240 CFA francs, marking an increase of 92 percent. Between July and August 2008 alone, the increase was 7.6 percent. The above-average cereal prices recorded on this main market have limited access by poor and middle-income households to staple foodstuffs. At the same time, survival strategies focusing on gathered foods and labor during this period have also been affected by the floods, as ready access to fields and markets has been prevented. Therefore, households that use these mechanisms to cope with the food crisis will find themselves facing a more precarious food situation.

Prospects for a rapid improvement in food security conditions in the region are weak. Although the beginning of the agricultural season (April-May) in the Moyen Chari region was normal, the rains stopped in July in some places. In addition, the current floods have devastated some 5,882 hectares of crops and disrupted plant development. Moreover, the intertropical front (ITF) is currently oscillating between the 19th and 22nd parallels of latitude, meaning that between now and the end of September, sizeable rains are still possible in the Sarh area which could further limit access to foods on the market. All of these factors are contributing to predictions for reduced food availability in the area during the October harvests. This is particularly concerning given that, in addition to the resident population, the area also hosts more than 23,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the Yaroungou and Moula camps. These refugees all depend on the market to varying degrees for their food needs.

To mitigate the impact of the situation in Moyen Chari region, immediate assistance (food and non-food, including shelter, household implements, water purification materials, sanitary products, and nutritional supplements) is needed for vulnerable households, and medium-term assistance will be essential until the next harvest in October 2008, and into the off-season (January-March) in some areas. While the United Nations' humanitarian agencies, together with Chad's government, are currently working to meet emergency needs, a joint mission between the government, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and FEWS NET is planned this month to provide a more technical evaluation of the losses caused by the flooding and the urgent food needs required.

Figure 1: Rainfall totals (mm) from July 28 to August 26



Source: NOAA