

## *OMD INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT: EB 2/2009*

### **'Getting prepared'**

Today, in West Africa, there is a threat of two new crises. On the food security front we must be prepared for bad crop results in several parts of the Sahel, where malnutrition rates are already above emergency thresholds. On the socio-political front the unfolding events in Guinea threaten the security of several countries in coastal West Africa, including Sierra Leone and Liberia.

When we met in July here in Rome, the West Africa region was entering the lean season which is one of the most difficult periods of the year; the Regional Bureau and concerned country offices were in a state of preparedness to face upcoming critical situations caused by floods in some areas, and insufficient rainfall in other regions, leading to drought and death of cattle. Over the past months and particularly since September, several countries including Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Benin and Gambia suffered from floods and across the region, more than 600,000 people were affected. WFP in collaboration with humanitarian partners rapidly responded to a sudden loss of assets and the destruction of infrastructure of chronic poverty stricken populations.

At the end of a typical lean season, chronic malnutrition rates are at their highest level of the year and food stocks are at their lowest. Communities, farmers and governments are anxiously waiting to harvest the fruits of several months of hard work. However, this year, the outlook in the eastern Sahel is alarming due to irregular and delayed rainfall during the crucial period between the end of September to the end of October. The first signs of upcoming food security and nutrition challenges are becoming visible in Chad, northern Nigeria, southern parts of Burkina Faso and Niger. In the western Sahel, the Government of Mauritania, FAO and WFP are closely monitoring the danger of a locust infestation that could potentially seriously affect agriculture production in Mauritania, and Northern Mali and Niger. We are concerned that these situations may result in new EMOPs in some countries. We thank donors in advance for their attention.

WFP, in collaboration with national partners and regional institutions like CILSS, FEWSNET etc. are undertaking in crop assessments and are

witnessing serious shortfalls of cash crops like peanuts and cereal crops particularly sorghum. Rainfall anomalies are not only affecting agricultural production, but are also heavily stressing pastoral livelihoods. Over the past weeks, pastoralists in Chad have lost about 30 percent of their cattle, a development which not only has a direct effect on the income of this population group and the cattle price, but also on the nutritional status of children who rely on milk products. In Chad, for example, there has been an unusual movement of transhumant pastoralists, normally at this time of year, the majority of transhumant pastoralists are in Northern Chad benefiting from green pastures. However, this year, they have already moved to southern Chad close to the border with Niger because of poor pastures in the north. This alteration in the transhumance movements is of concern and puts stress on natural resources and has the potential to fuel conflict. Among the most affected groups of this impending crisis are marginal farming households, pastoralists and market dependant urban populations. Findings from needs assessments will be crucial elements in the design of response options in collaboration with Government and other key partners.

I now invite you to turn west towards the coastal region of West Africa and more particularly to Guinea. Since the recent violent repression of an anti-government demonstration in Conakry, and with increasing insecurity day after day, the future of the country and the entire sub-region is uncertain. A deterioration of the situation leading to population movements, both internal as well as cross-border, would affect several neighboring countries and thus requires appropriate sub-regional preparation involving all partners. As the co-lead of the Dakar-based Emergency Preparedness Taskforce (consisting of UN Agencies and other humanitarian actors), WFP is strongly involved in the establishment of the Guinea + 6 interagency contingency plan and capacity building in areas of emergency preparedness and response. Based on a working scenario of a population movement of 500,000 people, WFP is further strengthening its logistics and needs assessment capacity in Guinea and neighboring countries through a preparedness operation launched for this purpose. WFP is seriously concerned both for its staff as well as the local population, suffering from the recent events and living in a climate of fear and uncertainty. Experience from the 2007 strike in Guinea shows that political insecurity is likely to translate into higher prices for rice and a disruption in markets between major towns; this context is increasing vulnerability for thousands of households and overstressing coping strategies.

Partnerships are particularly key in dealing with the above-mentioned situations: from assessing the food security and nutrition situation to designing and implementing needed response options. Multi stakeholder contingency planning, on a sub regional scale, is crucial.

WFP Country Offices are collaborating closely with Ministries of Agriculture and FAO to increase agricultural production and improve food security.

In the area of nutrition, based on the experience gained through the REACH initiative currently piloted in Mauritania and Laos, WFP is working with key partners to build a greater nutrition alliance to improve efficiency through effective partnerships. At regional level, WFP is chairing a food security and nutrition working group which strives to jointly tackle above-mentioned challenges.

In West Africa, causes of problems linked to food security vary and so do their solutions. CAADP seems to provide some interesting solutions to some of the structural problems which African agriculture is facing; rain-fed agriculture and increasing exposure to erratic weather, By the end of this year, 10 countries of the region will have signed the CAADP compact agreement, and WFP in close relationship with NEPAD and the African Union is providing the necessary guidance to Governments in the integration of matters related to food security.

Agriculture in the African context is heavily dependant on rainfall and is thusly exposed to climatic hazards. WFP is committed to working with partners to implement activities that aim to build community-level resilience to erratic rainfall patterns. Working with others WFP continues to support improved Natural Resource Management activities that have proven to be successful across the Sahel. Small scale irrigations projects, terracing agriculture lands, planting protection belts are widely recognized as contributing to re-greening large swaths of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In Mali for example, strengthened water management structures in the Lake Faguibine system improved the water supply resulting in the opening for cultivation of up to 11,780 hectares and reforestation of up to 45 hectares.

Thank you for your interest in WFP activities in West Africa.