MAURITANIA
Food Security Outlook

July through December 2012

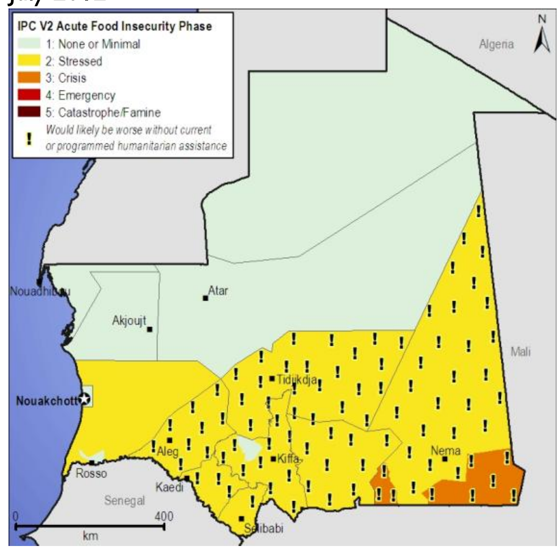
Key messages

- The onset of the growing season in July in southern rainfed farming areas (livelihood zone 6) is enhancing the effects of assistance programs. Food insecurity levels should decrease between July and September if current assistance levels are sustained. Food security among pastoral-dominant populations in agropastoral areas (livelihood zone 5) is still unstable, with livestock assistance programs falling short of needs.

- The earlier than usual onset of seasonal rains has already enabled a general startup of agricultural activities. The government has launched a national production plan focused on inputs and the establishment of new irrigation schemes which would lead to the development of cereal cropping areas at least equal to normal year levels.

- Terms of trade will remain unfavorable to pastoralists in western agropastoral areas through the middle of August. However, improvements in pastoral conditions in rainfed cropping areas have already helped livestock prices rebound. This trend should gain momentum between September and December with the holiday demand, creating favorable terms of trade for pastoralists.

Figure 1. Most likely food security outcomes, July 2012



Source: *FEWS NET*

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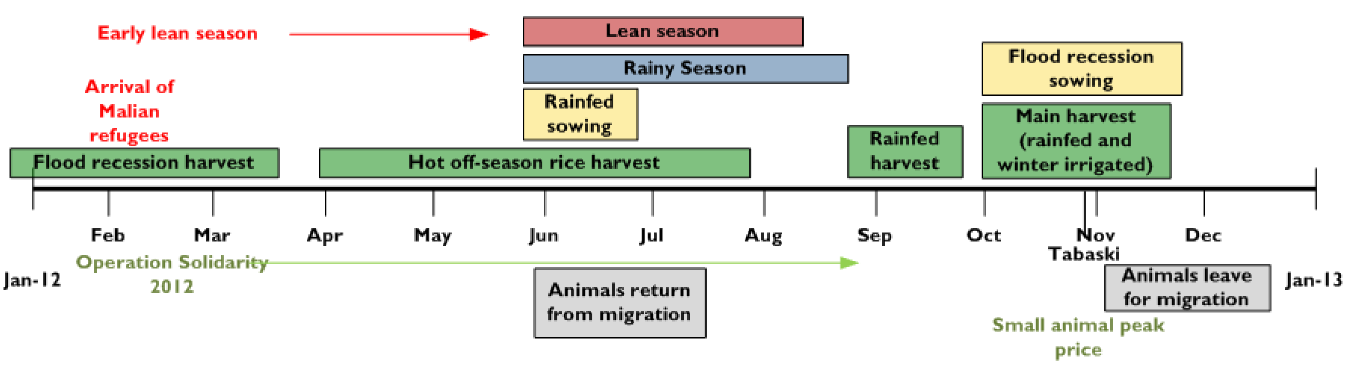
- An average or slightly below-average growing season, income from revitalized farming activities, output from pastoral activities invigorated by new pasture growth, the extension of assistance programs, and the stabilization of cereal prices are expected to result in general food security improvements as of October, where very poor and poor households should be in either IPC Phase 2 (stressed) or IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity). The steady influx of Malian refugees in the southeast could keep host households at crisis levels without the continuation of adequate assistance programs.

Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events



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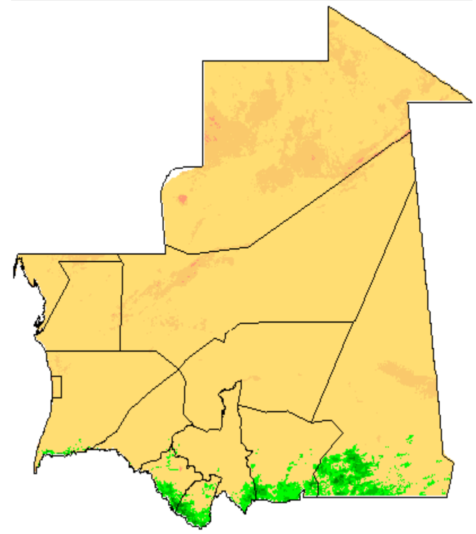
Most likely food security scenario for July through December 2012

Growing season

In general, the rainy season has been fully underway in areas of preoccupation since the first dekad of July. However, conditions are still extremely mixed with regard to the distribution and regularity of rainfall. Approximately half the country's rainfall gauging stations are reporting normal to above-normal rainfall totals compared with the ten-year average (2001-2010). While many areas (agropastoral and transhumant pastoral areas and the central and western reaches of the Senegal River Valley) received heavy rainfall in the last two dekads of July, the growing season is still beginning on time in all areas and the surplus rainfall has not yet produced consistently good pastoral conditions. The only real improvement in the condition of pasture has been in rainfed farming areas, promptly triggering the return migration by certain transhumant herds and overgrazing problems. Only in certain pockets of rainfed farming areas along the Malian border and between the southeastern reaches of Maghama department in Gorgol and the southwestern reaches of Bassikounou department in Hodh Echargui are conditions conducive to the planting and growth of crops and pasture development.

Figure 1. Vegetation index as of July 7, 2012



Source: Direction de l'Agriculture:

The failure of the 2011 growing season triggered two to three times more seasonal labor migration than usual, depending on the level of dependency on farming activities. Rainfed farming areas and southern agropastoral areas were depleted of most of their workforce. However, this rural workforce is beginning to slowly return with the start-up of the government's annual « *Retour au Terroir* » (Back to the Land) program providing free transportation for anyone wishing to go back to crop-producing areas. With the help of the FAO, the government has mobilized 560 metric tons of coarse grain seeds (300 MT from the Mauritanian government and 260 MT from the FAO) for distribution to farmers for the planting of rainfed crops in Hodh El Echargui, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Guidimakha, Gorgol, and Brakna. Of these 560 metric tons of seeds, close to 460 metric tons earmarked for the planting of rainfed crops have already been shipped to these regions but cannot be distributed until the targeting of program beneficiaries has been completed. The remaining 100 MT of seeds earmarked for the planting of flood-recession crops need to be distributed before the beginning of October. Fears of crop damage from large numbers of straying animals with the return of the first transhumant herds and the significant presence of animals belonging to Malian refugees in the southeastern part of the country are heightening farmland difficultuies in rainfed farming areas. The combination of these factors has left many tracts of land lying fallow, even in areas reporting good farming conditions (southern Hodh El Echargui and southern Guidimakha), where farmers are currently in the process of planting short-cycle cereal crops, though in 30 to 40 percent smaller than usual areas. However, with the upcoming distributions of seed aid, farmers failing to plant short-cycle crops are expected to plant large areas in long-cycle and late-season sorghum crops, which should be ready to harvest by October/November and December/January, respectively.

In light of these constraints, the government's production target entailing the planting of 230,000 hectares in coarse cereal crops producing average yields, for a gross output of 110,000 metric tons (compared with 34,470 MT in 2011), seems overly high. On the other hand, its target for irrigated farming activities, much less dependent on local rainfall conditions, (35,000 hectares under crops compared with 31,063 ha last year) appears much more attainable. The national production forecast is for a near-average harvest at best.

Despite some sightings of desert locusts in the southeastern part of the country, the locust situation remains status quo, with no major events. However, National Locust Control Center (CNLA) officials are concerned over reported infestation levels in certain border areas (of Mali, Niger, Libya, and the Sahara). The improvement in environmental conditions with current rainfall activity is heightening the risk of a locust invasion, particularly given reports of locust swarms in northern Mali by certain unconfirmed sources. Should these reports prove true, the country could face a scenario involving locust densities of as high as 30,000 insects per hectare, requiring the mobilization of massive resources, including vehicles and aircraft in addition to treatment equipment. A situation necessitating such a large-scale mobilization of resources would mean the loss of virtually all existing crops and pasture across the country.

According to the FAO, the World Bank is ready to provide US$4 to $5 million in aid to Chad, Mali, Algeria, and Mauritania, the four front-line countries in the locust control campaign. Meanwhile, surveillance teams have been deployed in all at-risk areas and arrangements have been made to provide decision-makers with a regular flow of information.

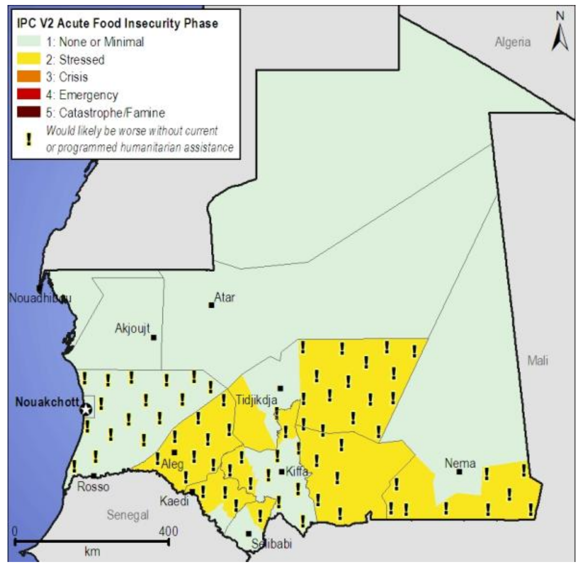
Market trends

The 10 percent rise in sorghum prices in rainfed farming areas between May and June reflects a common recurring phenomenon (price increases of 10 to 20 percent) between the lean season (April/May) and the harvesting period for short-cycle crops (in September). The tightening of supplies due to restrictions on trade between Mauritania and Mali will only heighten the effects of seed demand. Business on a number of cross-border markets such as Bassikounou, Adel Bagrou, Modibougou, Gogui, and Voulaniya serving as channels for cereal transfers between the two countries has slowed, where trade volumes are barely 25 percent of normal seasonal levels. Cereal traders from Nouakchott, unable to sell sorghum stocks with the departure of transhumant animals and reduced demand for animal feed, are provisioning rural markets. With seed procurement by the government and the FAO heightening competition, the current upward trend in prices will climb steadily between now and the end of the planting period (in November). Cereal purchases by middlemen in Mali would normally help prevent such competition which, this year, has been aggravated by aforementioned trade restrictions.

The upward trend in wheat prices, which slowed in May, has gained new momentum since June in all parts of the country, driving wheat prices up by seven percent in Boghé, in the Senegal River Valley, 4.7 percent in Adel Bagrou, a rainfed farming area, and by 5.4 and 5.8 percent, respectively, on the Magta Lahjar and Tintane markets in central and southern agropastoral areas. The small reported dips in prices are due mainly to the effects of one-off distributions of free food aid or harvesting activities, reducing demand for commercial wheat supplies. These rising prices should not affect the short-term access of very poor and poor households to this commodity as long as village-level food security reserve programs (SAVS) and government-subsidized shops stocked mainly with wheat are restocked on a regular basis. The 50 percent increase in household income from farm labor and cash transfers from assistance programs (15,000 MRO per household per month for the same period) should help contain these price shocks to a large extent.

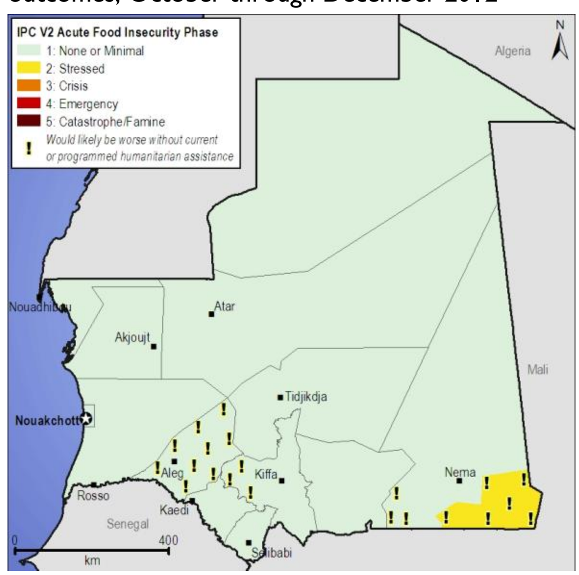
However, the disruption in market supply systems due to transportation problems during the rainy season and steep rises in fuel prices could widen the gap between supply and demand resulting from reduced trade with Mali, creating unfavorable terms of trade for livestock versus other foodstuffs from a consumer standpoint. In such cases, wheat prices are likely to rise between July and August for lack of a substitute food product and in the face of the rising cost of transportation, particularly between June and September, when rainfall activity makes it difficult to transport goods into remote areas. Livestock prices are up by 9.8 percent from May in rainfed farming areas, where new pasture growth has restored the confidence of pastoralists. Prices

Figure 2. Most likely estimated food security outcomes, July through September 2012



For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Figure 3. Most likely estimated food security outcomes, October through December 2012



Source: *FEWS NET*

in agropastoral areas are falling increasingly quickly (-25.50 percent on the Tintane market and -11.40 percent on the Magta Lahjar market), but should improve in August with expected improvement in pastoral conditions in all areas and the anticipated large demand for livestock for the upcoming holidays in August and November. The rebound in livestock prices will steadily gain momentum between September and December, promoting favorable terms of trade for pastoral households, particularly after the September and November harvests.

Humanitarian aid

With humanitarian assistance programs planned since April experiencing implementation delays through June, food insecurity levels visibly increased during the lean season (April to June). However, the launching of assistance programs in June/July with the focus on distributions of free food aid, cash transfers, and the restocking of village-level food security reserve programs (SAVS) and government-subsidized shops selling food supplies for 30 and 40 percent below market prices helped to improve conditions. The assistance provided in southwestern and central agropastoral areas through distributions of free food aid and cash transfers (15,000 MRO per household per month) has already visibly improved food availability for poor households in these areas. However, as is the case with the government, which has cut the component of its assistance program involving the restocking of SAVS as of August, other stakeholders will more than likely also face funding gaps or the beginning of the rainy season will disrupt shipments and distributions of food supplies. The presence of 91,000 refugees with the arrival of the latest wave of 15,000 refugees in the first two weeks of July is a continuing source of concern for host communities in receiving areas.

Basic assumptions underlying the most likely scenario for the period from July through December 2012

The most likely food security scenario described below for the two main focus areas for the period from July through December 2012 is based on the following general assumptions:

- Annual rainfall levels will be below-average. However, the good spatial-temporal distribution of rainfall will ease the effects of any rainfall deficits, producing a near-average cereal harvest.
- The measures announced by the government in preparation for the growing season will be properly implemented in timely fashion. The 460 metric tons of seeds for rainfed crops already positioned in crop-producing areas need to be distributed as soon as possible and the 100 metric tons of seeds for flood-recession crops need to be distributed before October/November.
- Farming and pastoral activities in both focus areas will get off to a normal start beginning as of July.
- If necessary, seed availability will be ensured by household buying and borrowing.
- Pest control programs against grasshoppers and cereal-eating birds beginning as of July will prove effective.
- The locust situation will remain stable thanks to the implementation of an extensive surveillance system as of July and will not cause any major damage to crop and pastoral production in Mauritania between August and December. This assumption will be updated as new information becomes available given the potentially rapid evolution of the locust threat.
- Severe damage to pastures in Mali liable to trigger an invasion of Mauritanian farming areas by Malian livestock herds between September and December is unlikely.
- There will be an adequate level and availability of farm credit and inputs throughout the growing season.
- Good farming conditions will continue for flood-recession crops in livelihood zones 5, 7, and 2 and for irrigated crops (in livelihood zone 7 and oasis areas of livelihood zone 2 producing market garden and date crops).
- Pastoral conditions will improve between July and August and will remain good through December.
- Fuel prices will rise by one to two percent between September and December, driving staple food prices up by 10 to 20 percent, as has been the case in the past.
- In general, markets will function normally between July and December thanks to a large enough regular flow of imports to ensure good market supplies and a brisk domestic trade. Cross-border trade with Mali will remain slow but, in spite of continuing restrictions, should improve between September and December provided there is an average harvest.
- Income from employment in pastoral activities between July and December will be on par with income levels in an average year.

- There will be more use of coping and community self-help strategies based on team work and the sharing of food supplies between March and July of this year with the operation of assistance programs providing benefits which are generally shared through internal redistribution mechanisms, particularly in rainfed farming areas.
- Assistance programs (the government's social assistance program and WFP programs) involving distributions of free food aid, cash transfers, the restocking of SAVS, and subsidized sales will be effectively conducted by humanitarian organizations in both focus areas between July and September.
- There will be a steady influx of refugees throughout the outlook period, particularly in Fassala district, but their presence will not affect food availability on local markets.
- The level and availability of humanitarian aid for refugees will suffice to meet their food needs through December. There should not be any severe cereal price shocks affecting local markets.

Livelihood zone 6 (rainfed farming areas)

Rainfed agriculture, or the cultivation of *diéri* crops whose growing season begins sometime between July and August, is typically the main livelihood option for close to 80 percent of the population of this area. On-farm employment opportunities associated with rainfed farming systems provide 20 percent of the annual income of poor households (which make up 60 percent of the population) and harvests of these crops between September and November normally meet 35 percent of their food needs. Household food security conditions between September and November are buttressed by income earned from the harvesting, transporting, and processing of short-cycle (September to October) and long-cycle crops (November to December). The population of this livelihood zone is also highly dependent on cross-border trade with Mali throughout the year, which ensures the availability of jobs for seasonal migrant workers and seasonal supplies of cereal and other products, including farm inputs, on local markets.

Prevailing conditions prior to the beginning of the outlook period created unusual circumstances, particularly for very poor and poor households, for which the lean season began in March, two to three months earlier than usual, and which have been coping with steep rises in cereal prices since January. The earlier than usual start of the lean season as a result of last year's poor cereal harvest, unfavorable cereal and livestock prices, and the influx of close to 91,000 Malian refugees in this area gave rise to major changes in normal local livelihoods prior to the beginning of the current outlook period. Even with the on-time start of the local growing season, this has created higher than usual levels of acute food insecurity, with negative medium-term implications for very poor and poor households.

There will be a large shortfall in harvests of short-cycle crops as a result of the downsizing of cultivated areas, poor seed access, limited rainfall activity, and the large numbers of straying animals. However, the size of areas planted in long-cycle crops should be scaled up considerably, assuming scheduled distributions of seed aid are made on time and the growth of new ground cover eases pressure from straying animals on cropland. The combined effects of these different factors are expected to produce smaller than usual local cereal harvests providing less than five months coverage of the annual food needs of poor households, even with the implementation of the government's production assistance program for this season.

The earlier than usual onset of seasonal rains in rainfed farming areas in mid-June jump-started farming activities, with the focus on land preparation (land clearing, fence repairs, and dry planting), common in the eastern reaches of this area, particularly in Djiguenni, Amourj, and Bassikounou departments. The low supply of farm workers (with many seasonal migrant workers not yet returned) was a factor in the 50 percent jump in daily wage rates for farm labor, which will stay high through the end of the plowing period (August). However, the timespan for this seasonal income will be limited due to the high likelihood of reduced cropping areas due to concerns by middle-income and better-off households of crop damage from straying transhumant animals returning from seasonal grazinglands. These households normally farm large tracts of land using large numbers of local laborers between June and August (the plowing and planting period). However, wage levels should rebound between October and December with the beginning of the harvest season. Though receiving assistance, many refugees are continuing to engage in activities that are also the main sources of income for poor local households (selling firewood, charcoal, and straw, operating small businesses, and providing rural transportation services with carts and, in some cases, small vans). Resulting income losses for poor households will not be offset by the supply of local employment and will likely keeping those leaving receiving for urban slums in Mauritanian cities from returning to the countryside. Income from labor migration outside the area, mainly to Mali, between July and December will be sharply reduced by civil security threats in the east of the zone. With current progress in new pasture growth and development, no

change is expected for employment income from pastoral activities, normally low at this time of year due to improvement in pastoral conditions. Rainfall activity produces better surface water resources, and eliminates the need for pumping, and new pasture growth eliminates the need for outside labor for the distribution of animal feed to livestock.
Markets will continue to be well-stocked with imported cereal, but coarse cereal supplies will stay low until the upcoming harvest in November. In fact, the restrictions imposed on livestock exports to Mali by the Mauritanian government have already driven up sorghum prices, which are expected to continue to rise between now and August with the high demand for seeds. Wheat prices decrease by between 20 and 30 percent from their current levels with the reduction in demand as pastoral conditions continue to improve and end the speculation surrounding the marketing of these crops. There will be a sharp rise in the price of livestock between August and November with the heavy demand for live animals for the upcoming holidays and the tightening of supply. Pastoralists, encouraged by trends in the progress of the season in pastoral areas, will focus on rebuilding their herds decimated by animal sales and fatalities.

With continuing refugee arrivals, the likelihood of long-term residence over months (if not years) is high, such that regular assistance will be required in order to avoid a crisis with respect to the availability of pasture and animal feed in this area from mid-July to late August. Food security among poor pastoral and host community households will continue to deteriorate, particularly that of sedentary households whose animals are competing with an estimated 60,000 head of livestock belonging to the refugees for scarce pasture resources. Limited pasture resources and low water reserves in the Fassala Néré area (see Map 1) are compounding factors.

Though assistance programs focused mainly on the distribution of free food aid and the restocking of SAVS has been implemented in most local villages, current food insecurity levels classified in IPC Phase 3: Crisis are not expected to significantly improve until August at the earliest. The combined effects of these assistance programs and the improvement in pastoral conditions (better access to milk) should mitigate losses and gradually bring down food insecurity levels to IPC Phase 2: Stress and, eventually, to IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity) between October and December. The repercussions of the survival strategies implemented between November of last year and May of this year (borrowing against future harvests and/or in return for future labor) are likely to affect this process but, unless a social shock upsets the relationships built by poor households with their creditors, the system should kick back in again as accounts start to be settled. Only the Bassikounou department is liable to remain in IPC Phase 2 (stressed), where the extended presence of the refugee population could heighten market demand and curtail the market access of poor local households.

Livelihood zone 5 (central, southern, and eastern agropastoral areas)

Approximately 60 percent of the population of this livelihood zone is categorized as very poor or poor. The poverty rate among farming-oriented agropastoralist households (central and southern reaches of this area) is well above that of pastoral-dominant households (east, the west, and the north). These households normally depend on market purchase to meet close to 35 percent of their annual food needs between January/February and August. Their food purchases are made with income from harvests of flood-recession crops between April and September (supplying approximately 20 percent of household income) and the proceeds from cash loans against future harvests or future demand for farm labor. Short-term seasonal labor migration outside the area between March-April and June provides approximately 40 percent of the annual income of this group of households. Other sources of food and income, namely milk and meat consumption, livestock sales, gifts, small-scale trade, and the gathering of wild plant products, are all comparatively small (less than 10 percent each for the year). Agro-dominant households with somewhat more diversified resources resort to market purchase only during the lean season (from March to July), while their pastoral-dominant counterparts make one-time purchases at harvest time to supplement household production, which generally provides four months coverage of their annual cereal needs. While food insecurity levels for agropastoral households normally begin to ease with the onset of the rainy season, the food security of agro-dominant agropastoral households is largely contingent on the September harvests of short-cycle crops.

The deterioration in the food security situation of poor agropastoralists (with the exception of households in the northern and eastern reaches of this livelihood zone) in July of this year was much worse than usual due to the failure of the 2011 harvest of rainfed (*diéri*) crops, small harvests in lowland areas in February/March, and poor pastoral conditions since October of last year (marked by shortages of pasture and poor water access). These household groups have been resorting to cereal purchase since November of last year in order to meet food needs, nearly four months sooner than usual. Livestock assistance programs have failed to meet the needs of remaining animals and pastoralists, who are continuing to sell livestock at low prices and to borrow supplies of wheat and animal feed.

The planting of rainfed crops has not yet fully started, which rules out a large September harvest. However, with most of the country's lowland areas concentrated in this livelihood zone, farmers can still plant larger areas in long-cycle and flood-recession crops.

The expected improvement in pastoral conditions in July with the beginning of the rains has thus far failed to materialize and pastoralists are still resorting to the use of wheat and feed cakes as animal feed. These households still have no access to milk, in spite of the low price of livestock, are continuing to sell animals to feed themselves and maintain their remaining herds. Even if pastoral conditions improve in August, this cannot be expected to have significant impact on the food systems of poor households until December for households where livestock continue to consume poor diets, affecting reproduction. While the area has received heavy rain, covering lowland and depression areas with water and flooding certain sites (in Magta Lahjar, Sangrava, and Choggar), it has been in the form of isolated, localized rainfall activity. The expected widespread rainfall activity in August should improve the physical condition of livestock, eventually driving price increases and, as a result, improving the access of poor households to wheat supplies (the main substitute cereal in this area), even if wheat prices do not decrease significantly. Improvements in pastoral conditions and even minimal harvests of rainfed crops should bolster the positive effects of assistance programs between September and December, gradually putting these households in IPC Phase 1 (no acute food insecurity). However, food insecurity levels in the northwestern reaches of this livelihood zone, where transhumant herds are currently in seasonal grazing areas and which is highly dependent on the cultivation of flood-irrigated areas will remain in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) until the next harvest in late December.

With the smooth operation of community self-help networks (under which cash payments and food rations allocated to targeted poor households by assistance programs are redistributed to all poor households in a given community in equal amounts) and scheduled assistance programs (cash transfer programs, distributions of free food aid, restocking programs for village-level food reserves, etc.), barring an extremely severe price shock or long-lasting disruption in market supply networks, there should not be a major deterioration in the current food security situation between September and December. The relative stability of food prices (except for sorghum), the improvement in household purchasing power with the mounting of assistance programs (cash transfer programs), increases in labor wages for pastoral activities (wages for drovers increased from 15,000 MRO to 25,000 MRO in June), the arrival of camel herders from the northern and the southern reaches of livelihood zone 2, and the implementation of seasonal coping strategies based on borrowing and the use of credit should help bring down current levels of food insecurity from IPC Phase 3 (crisis) to IPC Phase 2 (stressed) between August and September and, eventually, to IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity) between October and December.

Ongoing assistance programs designed to improve food access for poor households (cash transfer programs, distributions of free food rations, the restocking of SAVS, food-for-work activities, and nutritional assistance programs) will continue through September, particularly in agropastoral areas of Brakna and Gorgol. With the livestock assistance program unable to keep pace with demand from sedentary pastoralists in these areas, a large part of the wheat aid furnished by these programs is being recycled for consumption by livestock. Attempts to expand the coverage of such assistance has only served to dissipate its effects, and many households are still resorting to borrowing to feed both themselves and their animals.

Table 1. Possible events in the next six months that could change the most likely scenario

Area	Event	Impact on food security conditions
Nationwide	Rise in international market prices for substitute cereals (wheat and rice)	Low market supplies in Nouakchott. Shortages on rural markets. Sharp rises in the prices of both types of cereal, affecting the food access of poor households.
	Limited return migration by members of the rural workforce currently off working in urban areas.	Planting of extremely small areas in crops, which could create a large production shortfall, even with rainfall conditions marked by only moderate rainfall deficits.
	Malfunctioning of assistance programs	Destruction of the purchasing power of many households receiving assistance under the cash transfer program. Depletion of household food reserves from distributions of free food aid. Heavier reliance on market-buying, with much poorer terms of trade at market prices 30 to 40 percent above those charged by village-level food security reserve programs (SAVS) and government-subsidized shops.
Livelihood zone 5 (agropas-toral areas)	Large-scale locust invasion	Destruction of pastures and rainfed crops, prolonging the lean season.
	Epizootic outbreak. This is a recurring phenomenon associated with a long-term degradation in pastoral conditions resulting in the deaths of large numbers of enfeebled animals in the course of outbreaks of certain local animal diseases.	Pastoral activities have little or no positive seasonal effect on household food security.
	Sharp rise in demand for livestock	Improvement in terms of trade.
Livelihood zone 6 (rainfed farming areas)	Heightening of civil security threats Extension of restrictive measures, possibly leading to reprisals by Malian populations in border areas	Restriction of the free movement of persons and goods between Mauritania and Mali. Limited deliveries of supplies to border markets serving as provisioning centers for northern rainfed farming areas and central agropastoral areas.