

RESTRICTED MEETING

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Covid-19 risks overshadowing and compounding the already 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.

Held under the auspices of the Commissions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the RPCA restricted meeting brings together the region's key food and nutrition security stakeholders. The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) organise the meeting.

While countries develop their strategies to counter the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), members of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) call upon all stakeholders to act immediately to provide rapid support to some 17 million people facing a food and nutrition crisis as well as 50 million people, currently "stressed", who risk falling into the "crisis" phase by June-August 2020. Urgent support must be provided to countries in the implementation of their national response plans.

1. In the context of Covid-19, the RPCA restricted meeting of 2 April 2020 brought together more than 200 participants via videoconference.
2. Cereal production of the 2019-20 agricultural campaign is estimated at 74 million tonnes, slightly up by 0.4% and 12%, compared to last year's production and the five-year average respectively. However, some countries are reporting large decreases in production compared to the average production of the last five years: Cabo Verde (-80%), The Gambia (-47%), Sierra Leone (-15%) and Niger (-6%). Root and tuber production is estimated at 190 million tonnes, up by 16% compared to the five-year average. The pastoral situation is difficult, marked by significant fodder shortages in Mauritania and Senegal, as well as in parts of Mali and Niger. Moreover, due to the security crisis, cross-border transhumance and access to pastures are reduced and risk being reduced further due to restrictions on movement related to Covid-19. Food markets remain well supplied, although there is already an upward trend in prices since the beginning of the year. This increase could accelerate, if Covid-19-related movement restrictions are maintained and if populations decide to build up stocks.
3. **The economic environment is deteriorating** as a result of the combined effect of 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 decline in cotton prices and the risk of price collapse as a result of the health crisis could lead to disastrous economic consequences in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin. Moreover, the sharp fall in oil prices heavily affects the region's oil-exporting economies. Measures to curb the spread of the virus (closure of non-essential trade, closure or restriction of markets, mobility restrictions, etc.) might lead to supply chain disruptions, significant loss of income, and severe deterioration of livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations.

4 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, disruptions to markets, reduced access to farmland and pastures, and the closure of many schools and health centres. Many food insecure areas are hard-to-reach, which makes it difficult to analyse the situation and to deliver assistance. In countries affected by the security crisis, state budgets continue to be under strain. Governments face difficult – if not impossible – budgetary trade-offs between security, health and food emergencies.

5 The risk of a desert locust outbreak threatens the region. The consequences of a possible locust outbreak, added to those of the armyworm, which now infests the whole West African region, could have a long lasting effect on the region's agri-food systems.

6 Nearly 17 million people (including 7.1 million in Nigeria alone) will require food and nutrition assistance during the lean season, including 1.2 million people facing a state of “emergency” (phase 4), if appropriate measures are not taken in the short term. This is more than double the number of people usually affected in an average year. This deterioration is mainly due to the security situation. The security crisis and the Covid-19 health crisis could tip over 50 million additional people (currently "stressed" - phase 2) into a food and nutrition crisis.

7 Acute malnutrition persists throughout the region and affects nearly 2.5 million children aged under 5 years of age in the Sahel. Poor nutritional practices, a lack of preventive action, closure of health centres and no standard treatment services for severe malnutrition are among the main causes.

8 RPCA members recall that it is urgent to implement and adjust existing response plans. Six countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Cabo Verde, Mali, Niger and Senegal) have already prepared response plans for 2020 with a total amount of over CFA francs 400 billion (EUR 61 million). Implementation will prove challenging given the serious budgetary difficulties of States and mobilisation of external resources. RPCA members urge States, with the support of their partners, to:

- Prioritise and accelerate response implementation for populations in crisis and emergency situations, including the prevention of acute malnutrition among children under 5 years of age;
- Update the 2020 food crisis response plans, taking into account the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Plan ahead and set up contingency plans for the desert locust threat;
- Take proactive monitoring and assistance measures for the 50 million people "under stress" who risk falling into a crisis due to the cumulative effects of Covid-19 and the security crisis.

They also draw the attention of States and inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) to the urgent need for specific measures to address the economic shocks in certain countries. Sierra Leone is particularly affected. For the first time, 1.3 million people will face food and nutrition insecurity between now and the lean season.

9 RPCA members express their concerns regarding the risks related to Covid-19, particularly:

- A collapse of food crop production during the current agro-pastoral campaign and a lack of food availability due to difficulties in accessing key production resources (inputs, credit and agricultural advice, etc.) and also due to the disruption of value chains (collection, processing and distribution);
- Increased dependence on non-African imports due to a collapse in local food systems; sudden price increases in imported food products due to major disruptions in the international market similar to during the 2008 crisis;
- Higher unemployment, loss of income and purchasing power for households, especially those in the informal economy, who will be hit hard due to movement restrictions and market closures.

10 RPCA members urge the States, IGOs (ECOWAS, UEMOA, CILSS) and partners, to trigger emergency mechanisms and immediately implement co-ordinated and ambitious programmes, that:

- Provide urgent assistance to populations who already face a food and nutrition crisis;
- Provide social protection to strengthen the livelihoods and purchasing power of the most vulnerable;
- Safeguard food supply chains, including the cross-border movement of food;
- Support local food supplies (e.g. shops with referenced food prices, local suppliers);
- Secure access to production areas and support measures to access production resources (e.g. inputs, credit and agricultural advice);
- Promote grouped buying in order to guarantee supply to consumers and fair prices for farmers.

11 RPCA members underscore the need for strategic information and request that States accelerate setting up national monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on food and nutrition security in urban and rural areas. They also underline the urgent need to plan ahead and design strategies to revive and revitalise agri-food systems, including non-agricultural segments (processing, collection, distribution), in rural and urban areas. In order to support these efforts, RPCA members request to launch as soon as possible actions to strengthen the resilience of food systems to shocks (environmental, security, health), with a view to optimising their contribution to economic growth and job creation.

12 RPCA members insist on the need to act quickly building on innovative, co-ordinated, forward-looking, flexible and rapid approaches as well as on the strong leadership of ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS. RPCA members welcome the outcomes of the ministerial meeting of 31 March 2020 to set up a high-level regional task force to monitor the situation and provide information for decision-making. An extraordinary meeting of the RPCA Steering Committee will be held in order to define how the RPCA will support the regional task force.