

RESTRICTED MEETING

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The Sahel and West Africa are facing a major food and nutrition crisis for the second consecutive year and 27.1 million people will be at risk during the 2021 lean season.

A swift and co-ordinated response is needed alongside strengthened political commitment to finding more sustainable ways of addressing recurrent crises and the growing need for food assistance across the region.

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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 connected the region's key food and nutrition security stakeholders (ministers and other government representatives, high-level officials of regional organisations, civil society and private sector representatives, technical and financial partners). The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) organised the meeting.
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1. The restricted meeting brought together, via videoconference, some 200 participants. RPCA members confirmed the final results of the 2020-21 agro-pastoral campaign and discussed the food and nutrition situation. They reviewed the response plans for the food and nutrition crisis unfolding in the region this year. During the Senior Expert Group's session of the Global Alliance for Resilience (SEG/AGIR), members discussed Mali's efforts to help its vulnerable populations become more resilient. They discussed key findings from the pilot exercise conducted by the government of Burkina Faso to evaluate its leadership capacity in the governance of food and nutrition security. They also considered how PREGEC tools can be adapted for use in both multi-risk environments and also for gender-mainstreaming. They also discussed the theme for the 37th RPCA annual meeting and the third PREGEC Charter evaluation. They discussed progress made by civil society oversight committees as well as preparatory work underway for the United Nations Food Systems Summit scheduled for September.
2. The 2020-21 agro-pastoral campaign was good overall, despite disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as some localised dry spots and flooding. Total cereal production reached 74.3 million tonnes, up by 9% compared to the five-year average and up by 0.6% compared to the previous campaign. The average per capita production (175 kg)

increased by 1% compared to the five-year average. However, cereal production is down by 8% in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea compared to the previous campaign. Tuber production, estimated at 194.9 million tonnes, increased by 11.6% compared to the five-year average. For pastoralists, there is enough pasture and water, but access to these resources continues to be severely limited in many conflict-affected areas. Similarly, public health measures related to COVID-19 continue to disrupt, and even block, cross-border migratory movements, affecting the livelihoods of livestock farmers and others in the pastoral economy. Nearly 57 000 livestock farmers with some 1.5 million cattle were blocked in January 2021.

3. The Network members highlight the following factors that exacerbate food crises and for which increased monitoring is required:
 - ▶ The security crisis, which is leading to large flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and an unsustainable surge in food and humanitarian assistance; Burkina Faso and Nigeria host 1.1 and 2 million IDPs respectively;
 - ▶ The effects of COVID-19 have undermined the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, especially those working in the informal sector. The handling of both the pandemic and the security crisis is straining government budgets, limiting their ability to respond to food emergencies, and further limiting their ability to tackle the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity;

- ▶ Persistent inflation in several countries (The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone). The intertwined effects of inflation, the security crisis and the health crisis are causing food prices to surge - more than 40% above the five-year average in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone - and making it difficult for vulnerable households to afford food.

4. For the second consecutive year, the region is facing an unprecedented food and nutrition crisis. The Cadre harmonisé analysis indicates that 19.6 million people, including 9.2 million in Nigeria, currently require urgent food and nutrition assistance. By June-August 2021, the number of acutely-food insecure people may reach 27.1 million people, including 12.8 million in Nigeria, if appropriate measures are not taken. An additional 51 million people are currently “under pressure” (phase 2) and could fall into a crisis situation. This number may reach 67 million during the lean season. In 2020, more than 1.5 million malnourished children aged 6-59 months were admitted to recovery health centres. The overall nutritional situation could deteriorate further in 2021 as the security crisis persists, causing health centres and schools to close and depriving children of school meals. Faced with this food emergency, **the RPCA calls for a swift and co-ordinated response from all stakeholders.** In particular, it recommends that ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS work together to **activate regional solidarity mechanisms as quickly as possible to combat food crises and support the work of their member states**, as was the case in 2020.

5. The Network highlights the worrying proliferation of food crises in the region. The Liptako-Gourma region, the Lake Chad Basin and northern Nigeria remain acute food insecurity hotspots, largely fuelled by the security crisis. In addition, the Gulf of Guinea countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) have experienced food emergencies for the past three years. In these countries, the crises are mainly caused by inflation and economic shocks, which could affect approximately 0.68, 0.94 and 1.8 million people respectively during the 2021 lean season. It is the second year in a row that Sierra Leone has reported more than 1 million acutely food-insecure people. Thus, the RPCA reiterates its April 2020 recommendation to ECOWAS regarding the critical need to **work with relevant countries to implement robust mitigation measures and help vulnerable households become more resilient so they can cope with the effects of inflation.**

6. The handling of the 2020 food crisis highlighted the crucial role of effective co-ordination. It also underscored the severe lack of funding for response plans in a context of increasing demand for food assistance. These difficulties arise as countries face severe budgetary constraints due to several overlapping crises (food, security, health, etc.). The constant need to deal with emergencies undermines the ability of governments to invest in structural measures to tackle the root causes of hunger and malnutrition.

Presented with this untenable situation, **the Network calls upon all stakeholders for a paradigm shift and for greater political support towards more sustainable approaches** to addressing the root causes of chronic food and nutrition insecurity. To this end, it reiterates the call made during the 35th RPCA annual meeting and invites governments, with the support of regional organisations (ECOWAS, UEMOA, CILSS) and partners, to **fundamentally alter their investment priorities in order to support the development of more sustainable and resilient local food systems** and improve the livelihoods and resilience of the most vulnerable.

7. Building on Mali’s achievements in resilience building, the SEG/AGIR members recall governments and all stakeholders to make more structural, long-term investments to build resilience among the most vulnerable. This is the best option to tackle the root causes of hunger and malnutrition and thus break the vicious circle of recurrent food crises.

8. To do so, the region’s food systems require further support. The RPCA members ask ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS to seize the opportunity of the UN Food Systems Summit to promote a shared Sahelian and West African vision on food issues. They encourage these organisations to establish an inclusive Technical Working Group on the subject. They also welcome the Sahel and West Africa Club’s proposal to hold a meeting with its Members at the end of May. This meeting, as well as the SWAC Secretariat’s “Maps & Facts” issue on food system transformations, provides food for thought for the Working Group and will help it formulate a regional vision.

9. RPCA members commended the first steps that have been taken to adapt existing PREGEC and food security governance tools. However, the participants reiterate the need for effective gender mainstreaming in this on-going innovation process. The pilot experience of Burkina Faso has confirmed that the analytical tool for assessing leadership in the governance of food and nutrition security is useful in helping countries to pinpoint their weaknesses and identify possible corrective measures. Participants congratulate Burkina Faso and urge other countries to accelerate their self-assessment exercises so they can share their experiences. They also acknowledged the progress made by civil society oversight committees on the implementation of the PREGEC Charter and encouraged civil society organisations to scale up their work in preparation for the third evaluation, which will focus on the theme of “*Effectiveness of social protection and regional solidarity mechanisms in response to the structural causes of food and nutrition crises*”.

10. At the end of their discussions, Network members agreed to hold the 37th RPCA annual meeting on 6-7 December 2021 with the general theme, “*Women, conflict and food and nutrition issues.*” In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions will be pursued during the first semester of 2021 to agree on the arrangements for holding the meeting (with virtual and/or physical participation), as well as the choice of a host country, if relevant.