EARLY WARNING BULLETIN FOR FOOD SECURITY IN THE GAMBIA

No. 2009/17 **Period: October 11 - 20, 2009**

Government of The Gambia

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AGRHYMET Regional Programme

1. PROGRESS OF RAINY SEASON

The Azores high-pressure cell centred over the north-west Atlantic Ocean had a mean core value of 1021.5 hectopascals (hpa) thus weakened by 0.5 hpa as compared to the 1st dekad of October. Its mean position was located at about 28°N/17°W. Whereas the high-pressure cell centred over the south Atlantic Ocean (St. Helena) had a mean core value of 1027.3 hpa thus intensified by 2.0 hpa when compared to the past dekad and shifted north at 38°S/06°E. This pressure configuration resulted to moisture influx into the West African sub-region, hence the rain and thunderstorms observed over the Gulf of Guinea States and Sahel, including The Gambia.

Despite the above pressure configuration, the mean surface position of the demarcating boundary between the dry and moist region over West Africa (Inter-Tropical Discontinuity - ITD) continued with its southwards journey, but was located north of The Gambia over Kaolack in Senegal and Kayes in Mali.

2. WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR 21TH – 30TH OCTOBER 2009

The ITD will continue to shift southwards, thus reducing the moisture influx into the country. However, slight to moderate thunderstorm and/or rain is expected to affect the country on the 25th and 26th October.

3. RAINFALL SITUATION

During the latter parts of this dekad, rainfall was recorded across the country, with amounts varying between 0.6mm to 30.0mm per day. As expected during this period of the season, rainfall frequency dropped significantly compared to the preceding month. Number of rainy days varied between 1 and 2 across the country, leading to end-of-dekad totals varying between 2.3mm at Jenoi in the Middle Third and 30.0mm at Kwinella in the Western Third of the country (figure 1a).

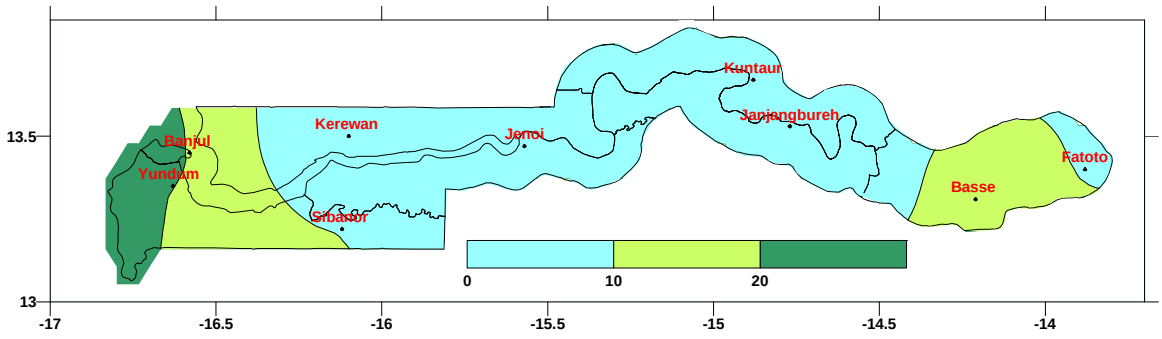


Figure 1a: Rainfall intensity during October 11 - 20, 2009

The seasonal (May 1 to October 20) total rainfall amount in the country ranged from a minimum of 674.0mm at Janjangbureh in the Middle Third to a maximum of 1354.0mm at Serekunda in the Western Third of the country (figure 1b). Rainfall amounts at the end of the dekad were adequate to sustain good levels of soil moisture, to allow crops in advance growth and development to reach and complete maturity.

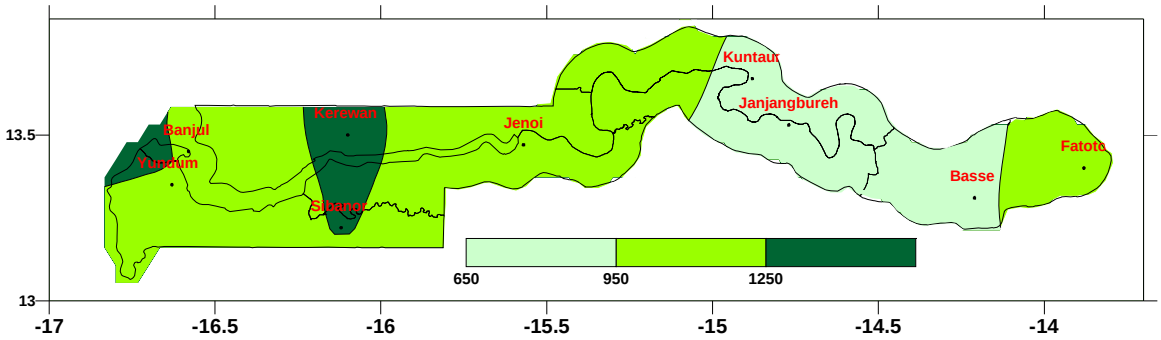


Figure 1b: Seasonal total from May 1 to October 20, 2009

In general, average rainfall from May 1 to October 20, 2009 remained slightly above that of last year during the same period. The country average as at October 20, 2009 stood at 1036.4mm, compared to 1004.4mm recorded during the same period last year, representing a surplus of 3%. However, this year's average seasonal rainfall is 31% above the long-term mean (789.1mm) during the same period. The season spatial distribution shows that only Janjangbureh in the Middle Third registered below normal rainfall.

4. AGROMETEOROLOGICAL SITUATION

During this dekad, mean temperatures slightly decreased by 0.5^{o}C to 3.0^{o}C in the coastal areas, whilst elsewhere they increased slightly by 0.4^{o}C to 1.5^{o}C as compared to the previous dekad. Extreme temperatures followed the same trend like the mean temperature. Highest temperature recorded was 38.2^{o}C at Jenoi in the Middle Third, whilst the minimum temperature recorded was 20.2^{o}C at Banjul in the Western Third of the country.

Relative humidity remained generally above 90% except in Banjul and Janjangbureh.

Winds were generally light in speed ranging from 1km/hr to 3km/hr.

✓ Crop water requirement

Rains received during this dekad would help to strengthen soil moisture reserve, thus favouring late planted and long cycles crops (120 days) to reach complete maturity. However, these rains will have negative impact to already harvested early millet and groundnut that is left in the fields for drying.

5. AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

Generally, the agricultural situation across the country remained impressive, as most crops have completed or are about to complete their cycles.

Harvesting of early millet is completed in most parts of the country. However, most farmers are yet to transport their harvests at home. Late millet is generally at flowering/grain formation stages in Upper River and Western Regions.

Harvesting of maize is also completed with the exception of isolated areas in the country. Sorghum is generally flowering/grain formation in the Eastern Third and other parts of the Middle Third of the country.

Groundnut fields across the country are at different growth stages ranging from pegging to full maturity depending on the variety and date of sowing. Harvesting of the Philippine pink varieties has gained momentum. In some places, groundnuts have reached full maturity but farmers are waiting for the rains to subside before harvesting.

Most upland rice fields have reached maturity and harvesting is in progress in most parts of the country. In the swamp rice fields, transplanting of rice nurseries is still in progress.

5. INSECTS AND INSECT-RELATED PESTS

Blister beetles (*Psalydolytta sp.)* and *Mylabris sp.* have continued to attack particularly millet fields. Sucking bugs of diverse species have also been observed to attack different crops. In some fields in the Western Region of the country, numerous caterpillars suspected to be armyworms were Blister beetles (*Psalydolytta sp*.) and *Mylabris sp.* have continued to attack particularly millet fields. Numerous caterpillars suspected to be armyworms were observed in some fields in Western Region of the country. The insects spared no broad-leaved or graminaceous or cultivated plants as they advanced and fed. The density of these pests projected at 85 individuals per square metre.

BIRDS

Village weaver birds ***(Ploceus cucullatus)*** form the most troublesome species during the said period. The irrigated rice and early millets were the crops that were highly attacked by these granivorous pests.

WEEDS

Weeds have been perpetuating or persistently regenerating during the reviewed period due to successive and heavy rains. There was not adequate sunlight to dry and kill weeds weeded by farmers. Weeds therefore continued to compete vigorously with crops. The number of weed seeds equally continued to increase in the seed bank of the soil.

Manual weeding, animal traction and in some areas herbicide application were used to manage the weed population.

DISEASES

In some areas, upland rice has suffered blast (Pyrecularia oryzae) attack although the scale was not large. Moreover, only susceptible varieties contracted the disease, but not all susceptible varieties in other areas.

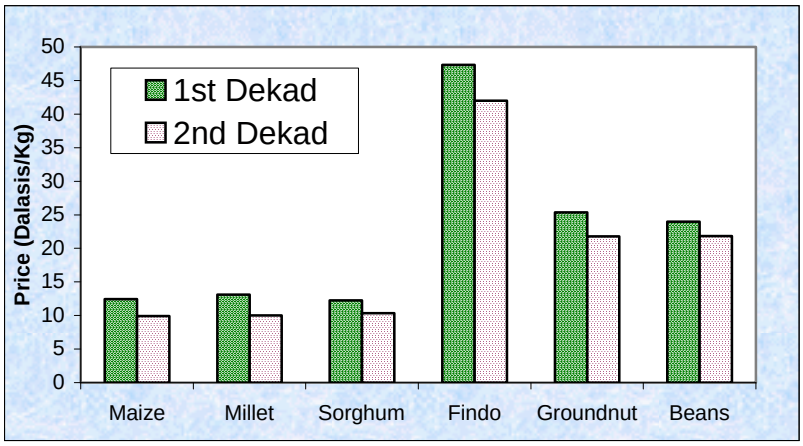
Nothing could help the situation, as it was already late when the incidence was reported. Nonetheless, farmers those affected were advised to uproot and burn the infected plants. Early spraying of suitable fungicides may help during the following cropping cycles. In addition, farmers should always be very careful and selective of the seed sources and varieties. Infected lands should also be avoided.

6. SITUATION OF CEREAL MARKETS

The food situation is satisfactory and is characterized by a general availability of stocks in households due to recent harvest. A large quantity of imported rice is evident in both retail and weekly markets all over the country.

Average prices of cereals at weekly markets continued to fluctuate depending on the volume of the commodities supplied and demand at the markets. As compared to the previous dekad, commodity prices remain lower (figure 2). Average prices for coarse grains during period under review ranged from D5.55/kg to D16.28/kg compared to a range of D7.00/kg to D18.00/kg registered during the preceding dekad.

The price of imported rice remained slightly lower than in the preceding dekad and varied from D13.45/kg to D17.35/kg, whilst ***Findo*** varied from D40.00/kg to D45.00/kg remaining the highest in all markets.



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