

Emergency Food Security Assessment in Niger: Synopsis of Main Findings

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Acknowledgements

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OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

1. The WFP emergency food security assessment (EFSA) was conducted in rural Niger from 15 September to 2 October 2005. The main objective was to assess food insecurity in rural households, ways in which the situation may evolve and the types of assistance that could help to improve the situation.
2. A random sample was taken to represent the rural population based on the 2001 general census; the strata are the seven rural administrative regions – Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder. In each of 98 randomly sampled villages, ten households were chosen at random; because two villages were small, the final sample was 974 households.

Limitations

3. Limitations include:
 - The sampling method does not allow representative conclusions to be drawn at the sub-regional level or estimation of the varying extent of food insecurity and malnutrition within regions. Rapid informal assessments should be undertaken when problems are reported at the sub-regional level.
 - Nomad populations are not sufficiently sampled, so valid conclusions for this group cannot be drawn.
 - The EFSA could not be complemented a qualitative survey including free or semi-structured discussions because of the short time available; information on household response strategies is therefore limited.
 - No nutritional data involving anthropometry and care practices were collected, because a nutritional survey was conducted at the same time by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)/Centre for Disease Control (CDC) using the same random sampling base; comparisons of food-security results with malnutrition rates will enhance understanding the main factors contributing to malnutrition.

EXTENT AND SEVERITY OF FOOD INSECURITY

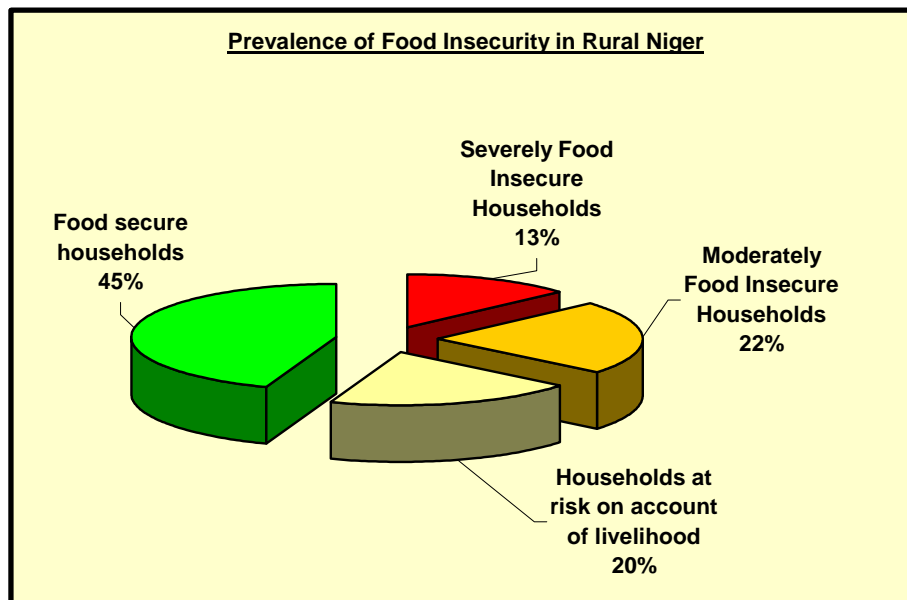
4. On the basis of a set of eight indicators reflecting varying degrees of food security and risk¹ and extrapolating for a rural population of 9.24 million people:
 - 1.22 million people – 13 percent – were severely food insecure;²
 - 1.99 million people – 22 percent – were moderately food-insecure;
 - 1.91 million people – 20 percent – were at livelihood risk; and
 - 4.13 million people – approximately 45 percent – were in a situation of food and economic security.

¹

- Food availability: duration of millet stocks for family consumption.
- Access to food and livelihood: (i) number of animals per capita; (ii) proportion of food expenses in total expenses.
- Resilience strategies: (i) extent of stock reduction (proportion of animals sold); (ii) proportion of food consumption from donations or loans in kind; (iii) proportion of food consumption from gathering or hunting.
- Utilization: measurement of variety and frequency of food consumption.

² The confidence intervals are: 13 percent (12–15 percent) severe food insecurity; 22 percent (20–25 percent) moderate food insecurity; 20 percent (18–22 percent) at livelihood risk; and 45 percent (42–48 percent) in food and economic security.

Figure 1.



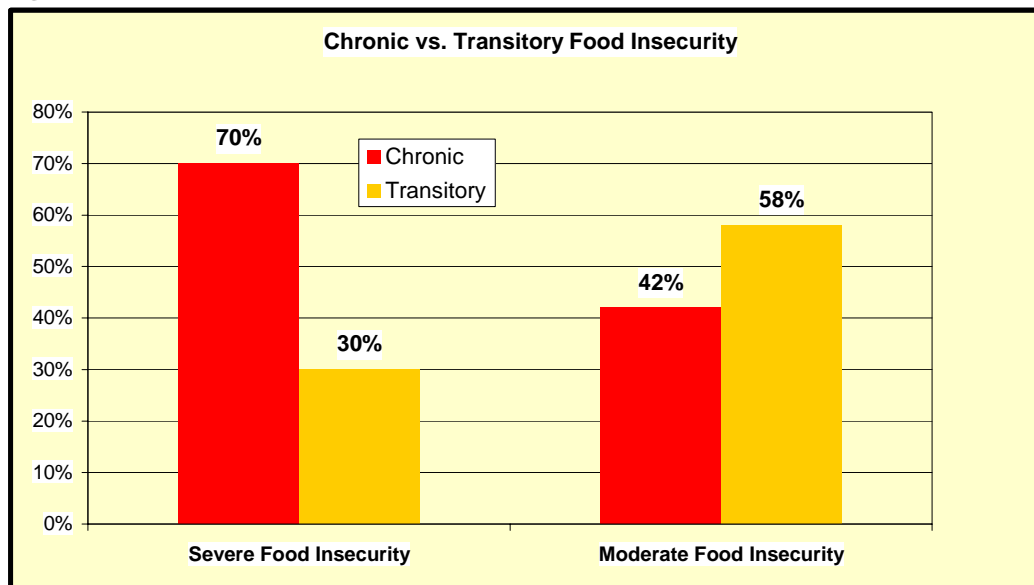
Chronic and transitory food insecurity

5. The increase in food prices in 2005 was not a new shock, but its impact on households' capacity for farming was particularly strong, partly because time was spent looking for food to the detriment of farming activities. Seven indicators³ were considered to distinguish chronic and transitory food insecurity in relation to "habit-related changes"; food insecurity was considered chronic when at least four indicators applied. According to estimates:

- among severely food-insecure households, 70 percent – 855,100 people – were chronically food-insecure; 30 percent – 366,500 people – were transitorily food-insecure; and
- among moderately food-insecure households, 42 percent – 839,100 people – were chronically food-insecure; 58 percent – 1,149,200 people – were transitorily food-insecure.

³ (i) Duration of millet and sorghum stocks compared with 2004; (ii) migration patterns of household members; (iii) principal sources of income; (iv) indebtedness; (v) ownership of means of production; (vi) ownership of small ruminants; and (vii) food consumption difficulties.

Figure 2.



Where are the food-insecure households?

6. Most food-insecure households are in the regions of:

- Dosso and Tahoua – 50 percent are food-insecure in these regions;
- Tillaberi and Agadez – 33 percent;
- Maradi – 30 percent; and
- Diffa and Zinder – 15 percent.

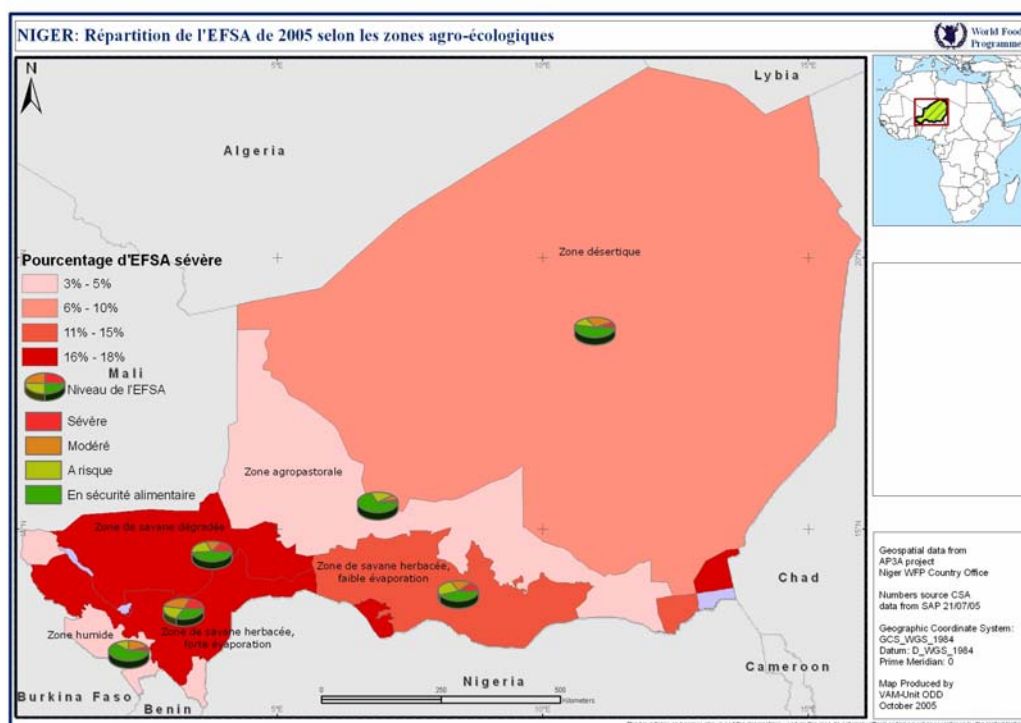
7. Most severely food-insecure households are in the regions of:

- Tahoua – 24 percent of households, 435,300 people are *severely* food-insecure in that region;
- Dosso – 19 percent, 261,600 people;
- Tillaberi – 16 percent, 298,000 people; and
- Maradi – 10 percent, 199,900 people.

8. Moderately food-insecure households are found in the regions of:

- Dosso – 33 percent are *moderately* food-insecure in that region;
- Agadez – 29 percent;
- Tahoua – 25 percent;
- Tillaberi – 19 percent; and
- Maradi – 19 percent.

Figure 3.



CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY

Overview

9. Most households in Niger are unable to produce sufficient cereals for their own consumption even during a normal year; they rely largely on the sale of animals, daily labour, petty trade and loans to purchase food and other items in markets. High cereal prices from the beginning of 2005 until the harvest in September/October and local harvest failures in 2004 decreased the purchasing power of households and the terms of trade for livestock. Households were forced to sell more animals to purchase food, sent household members to seek work and income, and incurred large debts with traders; they also called for support from relatives through remittances.

10. As a result of some of these strategies, food production in 2005 was less than it could have been because men were away in search of jobs when they were needed to help with agriculture. For these households, and especially those headed by women, cereal stocks from the 2005 harvest will not last as long as they might have. Households are also food-insecure because of the large extent of destocking; the fallback strategy of selling animals for cash will therefore be seriously impaired in the coming months. Households must also reimburse the large debts incurred this year if they are to benefit from loans in 2006. Given that reimbursement is based on the price of cereals at the time of the loan and not on current lower prices, a larger amount of cereal has to be sold or given back, which further decreases the amount left for household consumption.

11. Besides these conjectural causes, the structural causes of chronic food insecurity in Niger include:

- unequal land distribution in some regions;
- poor soil quality, erosion and poor knowledge of agricultural practices;
- drought;
- animal diseases and poor knowledge of animal husbandry;
- very low education and skill levels; and
- inadequate roads, markets, health services and schools.

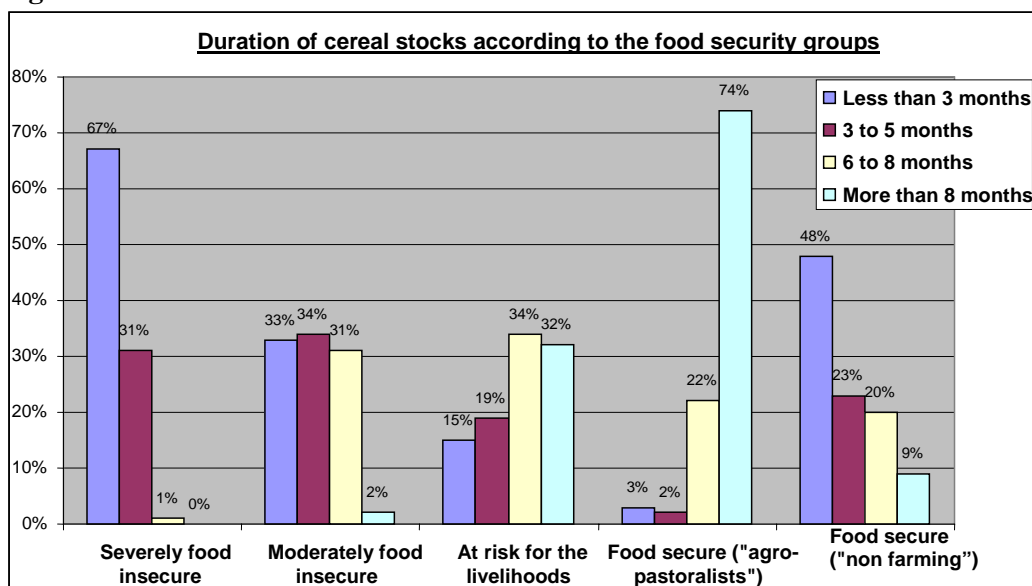
12. All households have been affected by the crisis in Niger. However, for many, food security has deteriorated significantly. The severity of food insecurity can be linked to the following factors:

- the duration of stocks from the 2005 cereal harvest for household consumption;
- the degree of de-stocking and the number of animals still owned;
- the extent of indebtedness;
- reliance on remittances and daily labour as essential sources of cash;
- inadequate food consumption and inadequate capacity to access food by production or purchase; and
- women as heads of household.

Duration of cereal stocks for household consumption

13. Households classed as severely food-insecure have less than three months' stock of cereals for their own consumption. Moderately food-insecure households have three to five months' cereal stock, which is not enough to last until the next harvest. Households whose livelihoods are at risk have about six months' stock of cereal. Food-secure households have cereal stocks for at least nine months.

Figure 4.



Degree of de-stocking and animals still owned

14. Severely food-insecure households sold most of their animals for cash or because they were unable to feed them. Moderately food-insecure households sold more than half of their animals. Households whose livelihoods are at risk are in a borderline situation in terms of remaining animals. Food-secure households sold animals but still have adequate herds.

Figure 5.

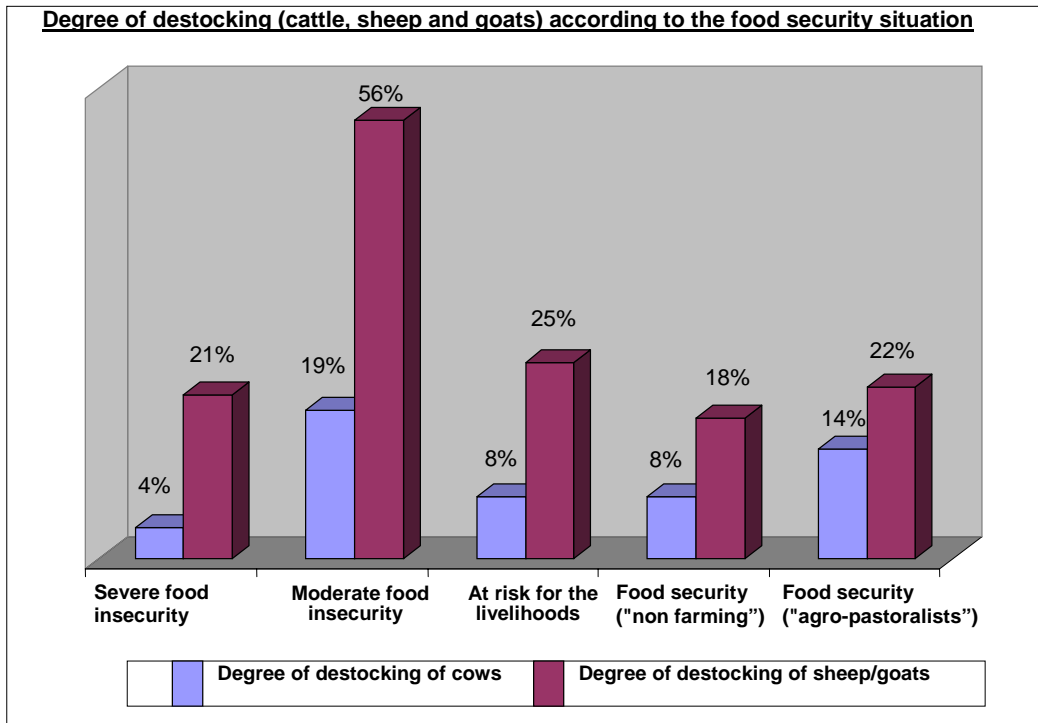
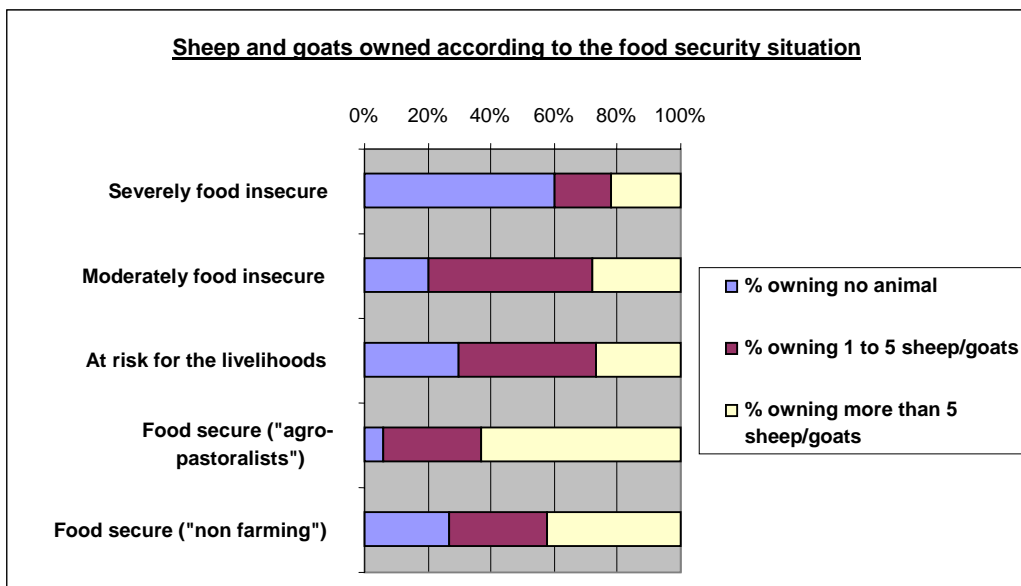


Figure 6.



Extent of indebtedness

15. Severely and moderately food-insecure households incurred large debts in 2005; severely food-insecure households have debts greater than average monthly expenditure on food. Households whose livelihoods are a bit at risk are less indebted than the two groups above. The indebtedness of food-secure households is less significant than the other groups.

Figure 7.

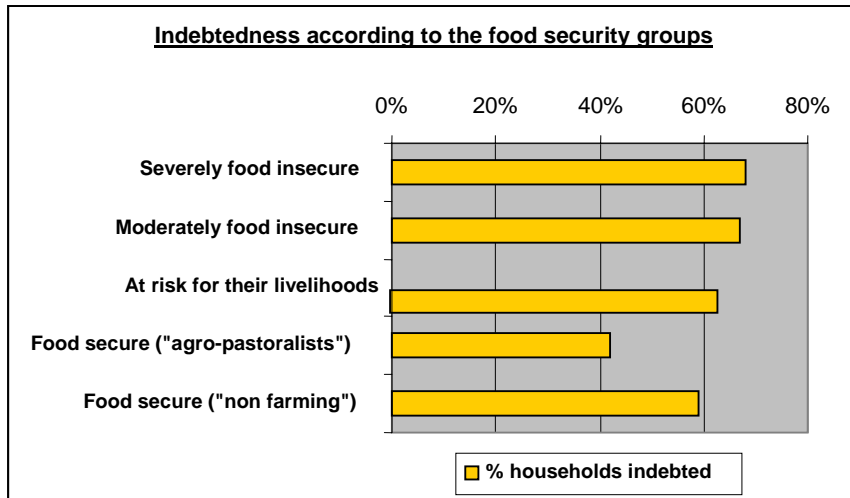
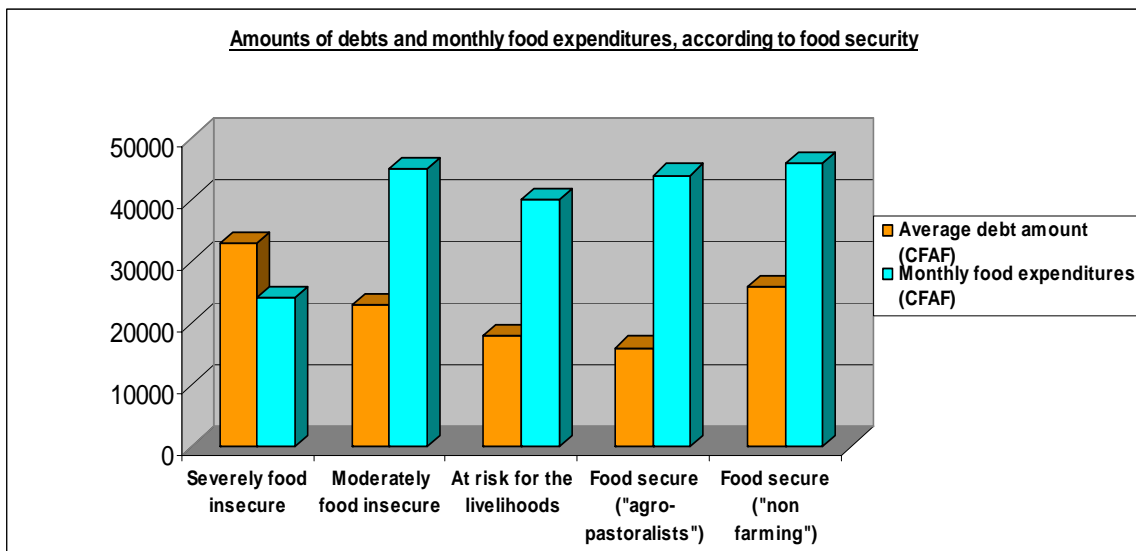


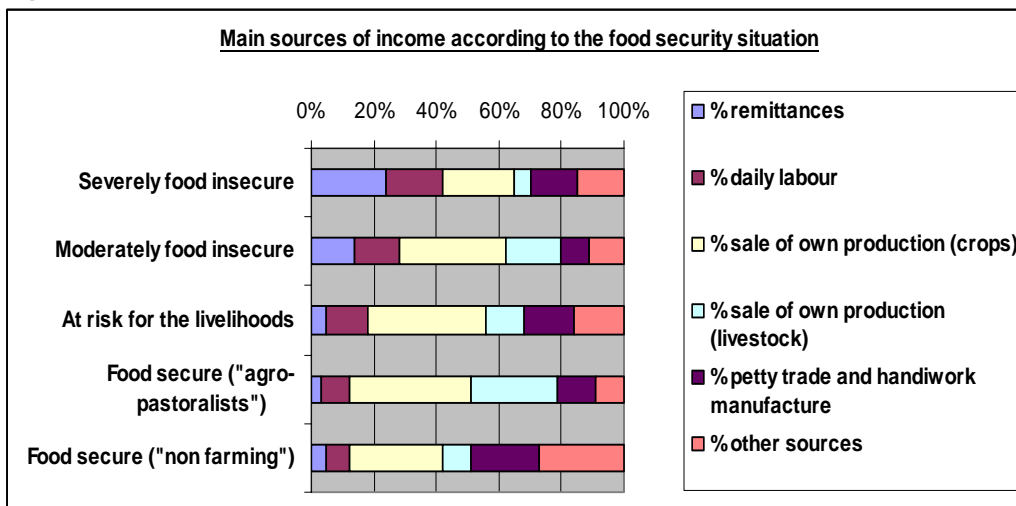
Figure 8.



Reliance on remittances and daily labour as main sources of cash income

16. Severely food-insecure households rely heavily on remittances and daily labour for cash. Moderately food-insecure households depend on sales of agricultural produce and livestock, daily labour and remittances for their income. Households at risk for their livelihoods rely on sales of agricultural produce and livestock, daily labour and petty trade. Food-secure households can access income by selling cash crops and through trade or from salaries.

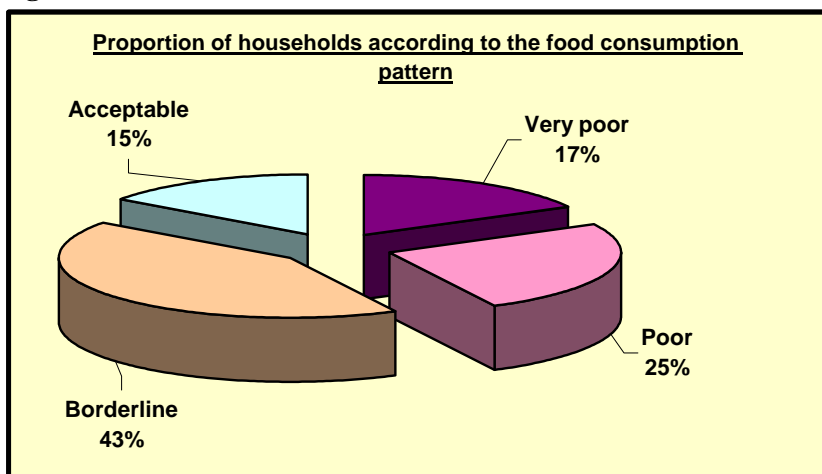
Figure 9.



Food consumption patterns, sources of food and food expenditures

17. Overall, about 40 percent of households had very poor or poor food consumption in terms of frequency of meals and diversity of diet during the week prior to the survey, which was at the peak of the hunger season. Very poor food consumption, consisting essentially of cereals, existed in 17 percent of households. Poor food consumption, which included cereals and animal products, was found in 25 percent of households. Borderline food consumption, which included cereals, legumes, animal products, fruit and vegetables, was found in 43 percent of households. Acceptable food consumption, which was similar to borderline but with more frequent consumption, was found in 15 percent of households.

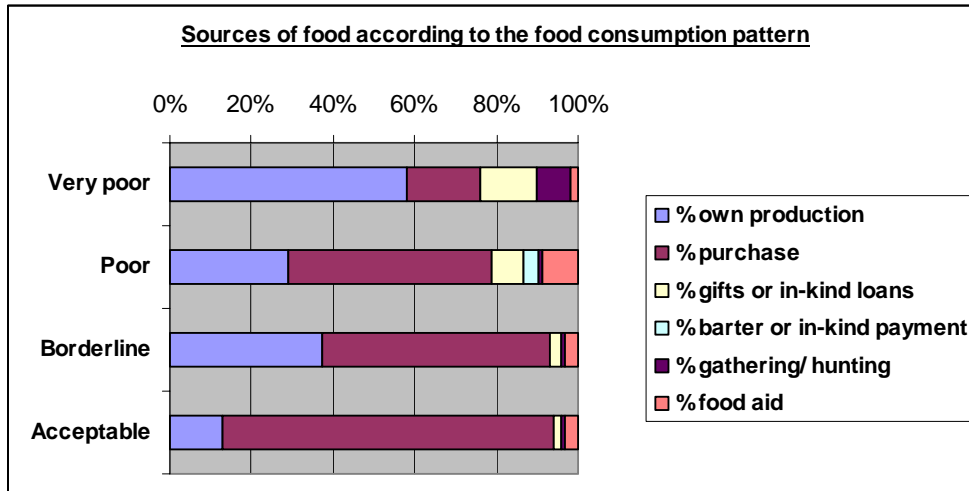
Figure 10.



18. The poor food consumption observed at the time of the EFSA reflects the harsh situation suffered by food-insecure households during the six months preceding the harvest. Poor health and inadequate care are also significant factors in the high malnutrition rates reported in Niger, where acute global malnutrition is above 15 percent on a yearly basis; however, lack of sufficient and diverse food, including milk, is an aggravating factor.

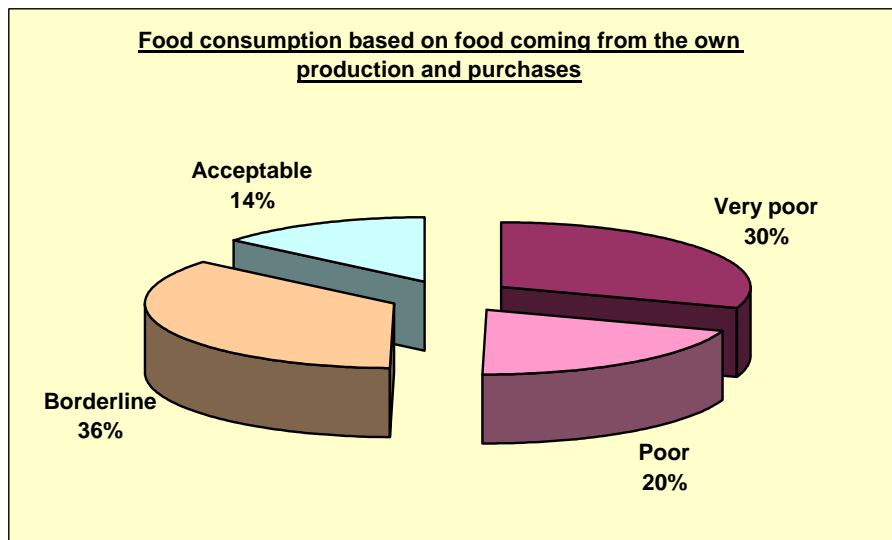
19. Sources of food consumed during the week before the survey varied according to the dietary pattern. Households with very poor food consumption in terms of frequency and diversity relied mainly on their own produce and received a significant amount through gifts or in-kind loans. Households with poor food consumption bought most of their food at markets and used their own produce; they consumed more food aid than the other groups. Households with borderline food consumption depended on markets and their own production for food. Households with acceptable food consumption purchased most of their food.

Figure 11.



20. When only food from household production or purchases – in other words the capacity of households to obtain food by their own means – is used to evaluate food consumption, the proportion of households with very poor diet doubles. This shows that without gifts, in-kind loans, in-kind payments and food aid, twice as many households would eat very poorly.

Figure 12.



21. The proportion of food consumed from food aid was very small, but food aid seemed to contribute to better food consumption patterns.

Figure 13.

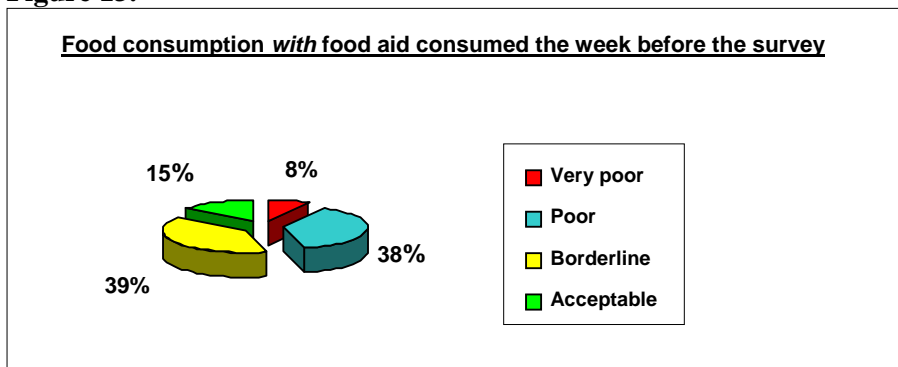
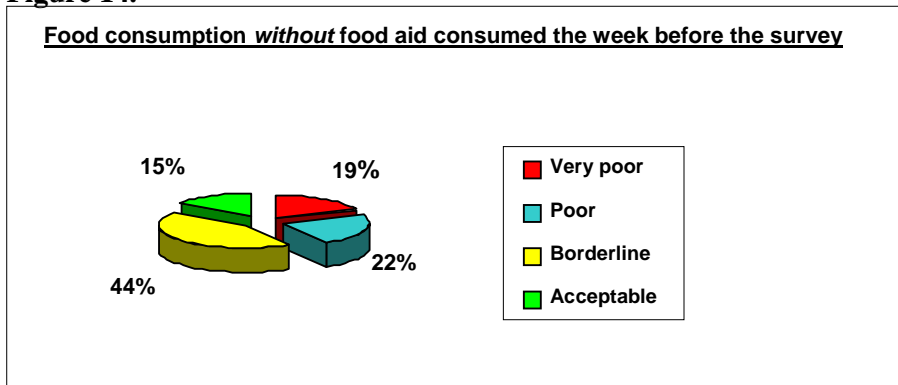


Figure 14.



22. Food-consumption patterns at the time of the survey, which was before the harvest, were significantly associated with food security:

- severely food-insecure households had very poor or poor food consumption in terms of frequency and diversity of diet; part of their food came from gifts and loans in kind;
- food consumption in moderately food-insecure households was very poor, poor or borderline;
- households whose livelihoods are at risk had poor or borderline food consumption; and
- food consumption in food-secure households was borderline or acceptable.

Figure 15.

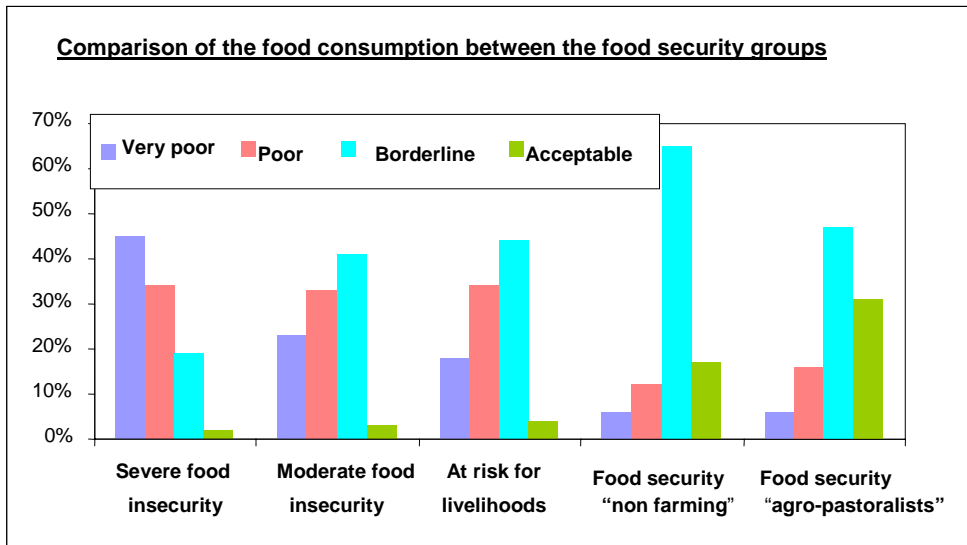
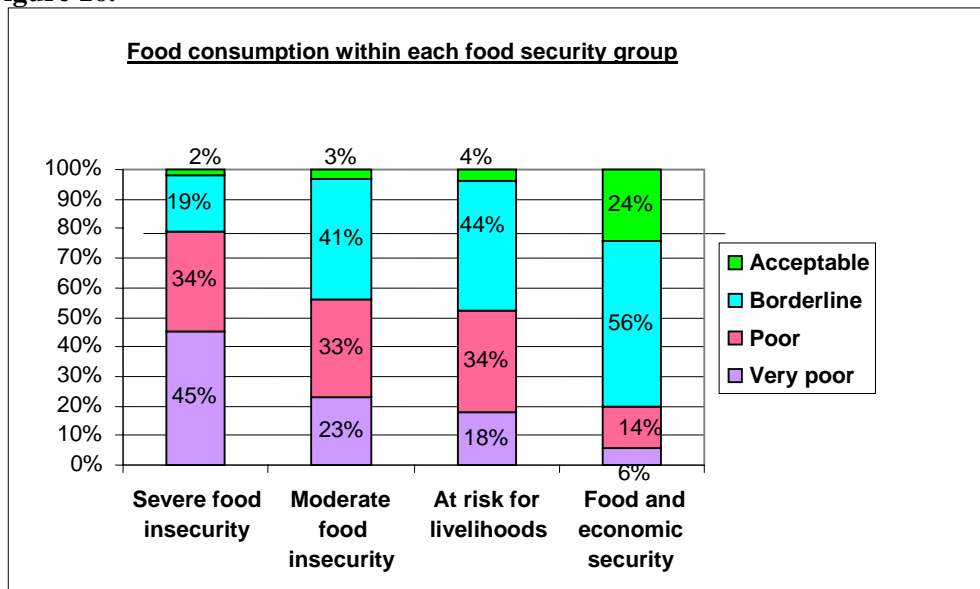
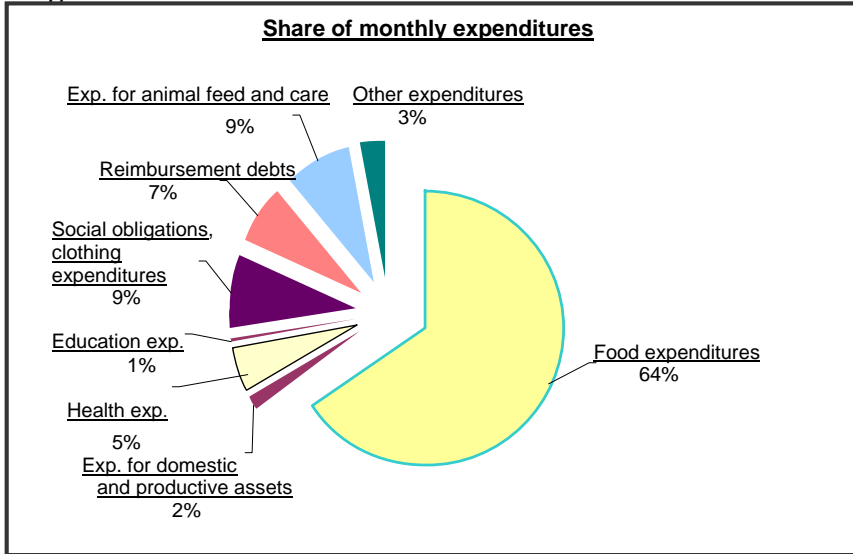


Figure 16.



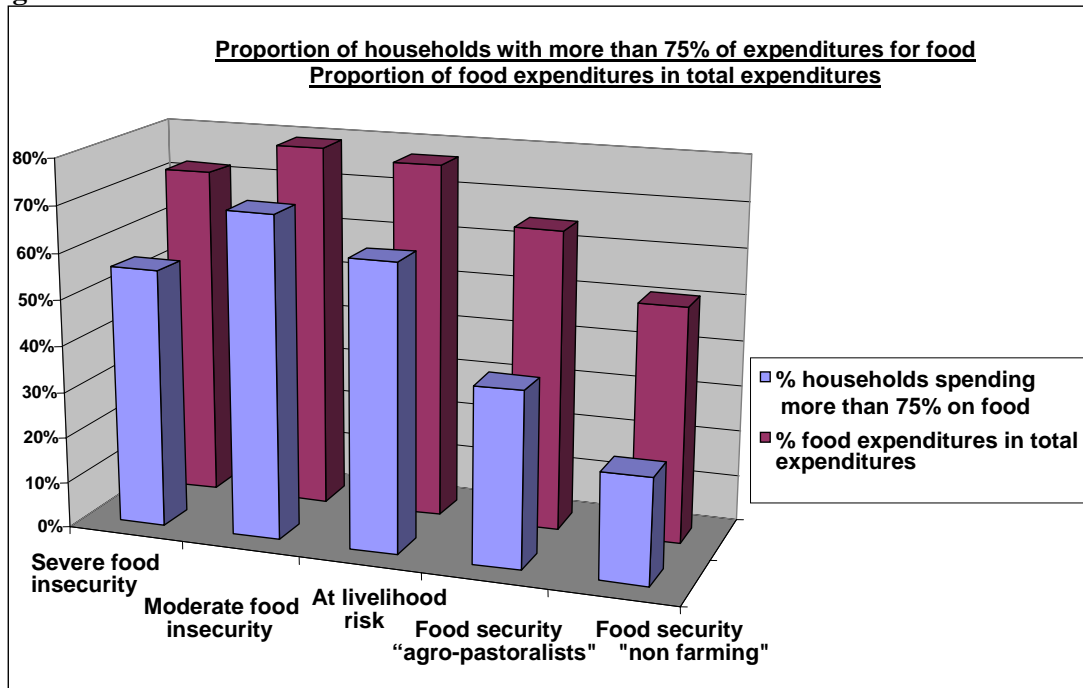
23. Patterns of expenditure during the month preceding the survey show the large share occupied by food purchases in all households.

Figure 17.



24. More than 60 percent of food-insecure households and households with livelihoods at risk assigned more than 75 percent of their expenses to food purchases.

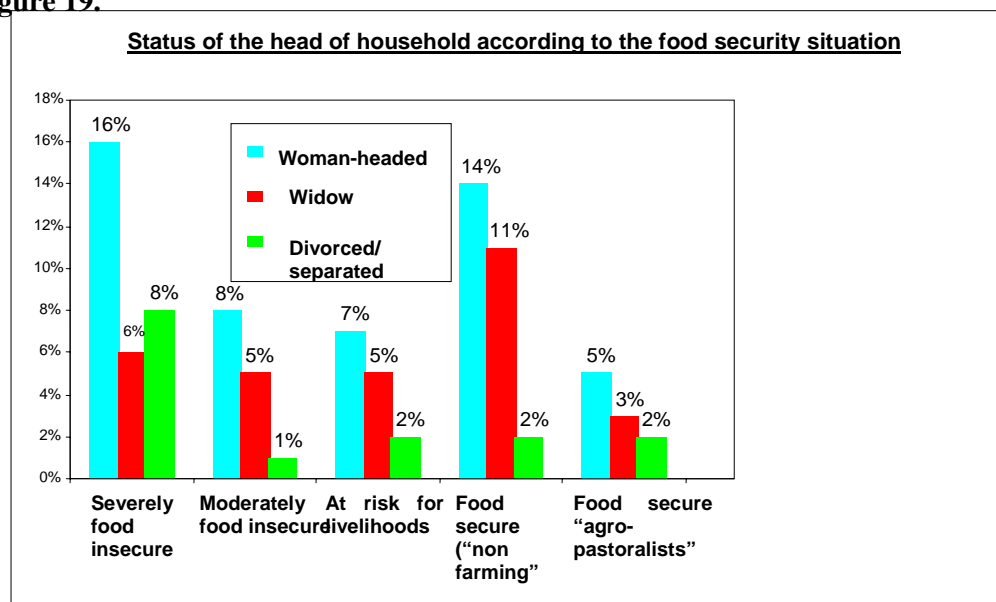
Figure 18.



Status of the head of household

25. Severely food-insecure households were more often headed by women than others. There was also a higher proportion of households headed by women among food-secure non-farming households, but these had better access to income through trade, especially sales of cash crops.

Figure 19.



NEED FOR AND ROLE OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE TO FOOD-INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS

Scenario in the absence of external assistance

26. Even if no shocks occur in 2006 – for example drought, locusts or another price increase – food-insecure households will have to fall back on their usual response strategies when their cereal stocks are exhausted, selling animals, looking for daily wage labour, obtaining loans and asking for help from family and friends. But because these coping strategies were stretched to the limit in 2005, they may be less effective in 2006, resulting in:

- greater migration of household members in search of work, which may have potential negative effects on family structure and may make it difficult for women to access household food stores - that are usually controlled by men - and maintain agricultural production; women will also lack time for other household chores, including child care;
- more sales of animals by those who still have any, which will eventually exhaust this essential asset; and
- more debt for those who still have access to loans, which will force households into a spiral of indebtedness, with negative effects on the availability of food from the next harvest because land may be sold, as well as standing crops before the harvest, in order to reimburse.

27. Remittances will also be a less reliable source of support, because the overwhelming poverty throughout Niger makes it doubtful that relatives will remain in a better position than those who are asking for help.

The role of food aid and other types of assistance

28. Assistance is needed to help food-insecure households to (i) restore their herds, (ii) increase the duration of their cereal stocks, (iii) purchase food once these stocks are exhausted, (iv) reimburse debts and (v) limit distress migration.

29. Food aid has a role for:

- households with limited working and earning capacity, such as households headed by women;
- households in isolated villages where markets do not exist, where little food is available in markets or where prices are too high; and
- households that cannot ensure adequate food consumption - with direct consequences for child malnutrition – for those who have children enrolled in therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres.

30. For these households, food aid can be provided through targeted food distributions, food for work (FFW), school feeding and support for supplementary feeding programmes.

31. Non-food support in the form of cash for work, grants or vouchers is appropriate for the first two categories of households provided that (i) food is available in markets, (ii) markets are accessible, (iii) prices do not increase significantly with an injection of cash and (iv) partners on the ground have the capacity to implement such programmes.

32. The most important non-food programme would be support for re-stocking herds, bearing in mind (i) the possible negative impacts, which may include environmental considerations or conflict with farmers, and (ii) beneficiaries' knowledge of, and capacity to ensure animal feeding and care. Training programmes on animal husbandry would be appropriate for food-insecure households to help them to maintain their herds.

33. Household and school gardens also encourage the production of vegetables for consumption and sale. Such programmes must be preceded by feasibility studies focusing on availability of land, water and time among households and communities.

Table 1. Total estimated needs for food aid programmes (WFP coverage would be adjusted downwards according to ongoing and partners' programmes)

Assistance programmes	Target group	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Duration (months)
FFW	Households that have done little or no crop farming or that have few or no animals; markets more than 10 km away; limited food availability.	96,458 households. Five food rations per household; 482,292 direct beneficiaries.	Three months.
Targeted food distributions	As above, but cannot work.	12,125 households. Five food rations per household; 60,624 direct beneficiaries.	Three months.
Supplementary food	Malnourished children.	400,000 children.	Six to nine months.
Targeted food distributions	Households with malnourished children; two beneficiary children/household	400,000 households. 800,000 direct beneficiaries.	Six to nine months(?)
School feeding	School-age children. ⁴	170,240 children.	Ten months.
Food for Training	Livestock farming households; targeting 10 percent of households.	19,077 households. Five food rations per household; 95,385 direct beneficiaries.	One week.
Support for village cereal banks	Priority villages.	900 villages. About 200,000 beneficiaries	Once.
TOTAL		2,408,541 beneficiaries.	
Contingency plan	Food-insecure households.	112,792 households. 563,900 beneficiaries	Three months.

Note: WFP could assist 1.6 million beneficiaries through the food-aid programmes above.

Table 2. Total estimated needs for non-food programmes

Non-food short-term aid programmes	Target group	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Duration (months)
Cash for work or vouchers for work	Households that have done little or no crop farming and that own few or no animals; markets less than 10 km away; no food-availability problems; no exceptional price increases.	24,115 households. 120,575 direct beneficiaries.	Four months.
Food or untied vouchers	As above, but cannot work	3,031 households. 15,156 direct beneficiaries.	Four months.

⁴ The number of children enrolled in school in 2004–2005 was 1,064,032 according to the provisional annual statistics of the Basic Education Ministry. The number of schoolchildren who could benefit from the school feeding programme was estimated on the basis of 80 percent of children enrolled in rural schools and a target of 20 percent of the villages, corresponding to those with the highest concentrations of food-insecure households.

Non-food short-term aid programmes	Target group	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Duration (months)
Rebuilding of flocks	Households that have reduced stocks considerably and that have no more than one cow and/or five goats/sheep.	190,770 households.	Six to nine months.
Livestock feed			Three months.
Healthcare for livestock			Three months.
School and family gardens	Households that have done little or no crop farming; households with little land; households with malnourished children.	400,000 households.	Three months.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TARGETING AND MONITORING

Targeting of priority regions

34. The priority regions identified by combining the distribution of food insecurity among regions with the severity of food insecurity in each region are (i) Tahoua, (ii) Dosso, (iii) Tillaberi, (iv) Agadez, (v) Maradi, (vi) Zinder and (vii) Diffa.

Targeting of priority villages

35. Indicators that can be used to target priority villages include:

- the proportion of households that only practice farming;
- the proportion of households that have sold their livestock;
- distance from markets;
- distance from health centres;
- the proportion of households that have migrated; and
- the proportion of households that have had to sell their land.

Targeting of priority households

36. Four or five of the indicators on food and economic security can contribute to targeting households for aid programmes: (i) duration of millet stocks for family consumption; (ii) number of cows; (iii) number of goats/sheep; (iv) for pastoralists number of camels; (v) extent of reduction in animal numbers of all kinds. Thresholds can be identified for each indicator to distinguish different levels of food and economic security. But none of them taken by itself is sufficient, so a combination of indicators is recommended for targeting purposes.

Monitoring of the situation

37. The important factors to monitor in 2006 include:

- the labour market in Niger and bordering countries;
- market food availability and prices;
- staple food and livestock markets in Niger and bordering countries;
- border controls on the circulation of goods and people;
- rainfall, crop diseases and predators; and
- conflict in Côte d'Ivoire.

Acronyms used in the document

CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
EFSA	emergency food security assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS-NET	Famine Early-Warning System Network
FFW	food for work
ODAN	WFP Emergency Needs Assessment Branch
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping