

# **Sustainable Development for Returnees from Senegal and their Host Communities in Mauritania Report Commissioned by the World Bank**

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Since the refugee crisis between Senegal and Mauritania began in 1989, the combined effects of political turmoil, economic disruption, and environmental degradation have continued to undermine the health, livelihood, and food security in the project area. The returnee population and host communities therefore represent a particularly vulnerable group requiring specific, well-tailored support to address the complex and interrelated issues specific to the region.

## **Food Security and Nutrition**

According to a recent food security assessment conducted by CILSS, FAO, FEWS NET, and WFP, the cereal production forecast for the campaign 2011/2012 amounted to some 116,000 tons, down 40 percent from the five-year average. Lack of rain has brought a pastoral crisis characterized by a lack of watering points and grazing land. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the mortality rate for livestock has increased and the migration of livestock has been of lower amplitude than in normal years.

A FEWS NET alert issued in November 2011 indicates that the drop in agricultural and pastoral production has severely affected the livelihoods of households. Poor households, which constitute 60% of the population in affected areas, depend heavily on agriculture for their food and income. The sale of agricultural products and wages from agricultural labor during harvest time provides one-third of household income and allows households to repay their debts. The fall in food production has increased the share of food that poor households must buy on the market at an average of 30-40% to 45-60% thus far in 2012. As a result, the share of poor household income devoted to food has doubled to cover the expected drop in revenue.

Before the onset of this most recent crisis, food prices were already at an all-time high in Mauritania, a country that is 75% dependent on imports for its food supply. Grain prices on the international market are one of the main determinants of food security in Mauritania, especially in urban areas and deficit areas of agricultural production. The average prices of wheat have remained at high levels since late 2010. By September 2011, wheat prices had increased 38% over the five-year average and 10% from the record levels achieved during the price rise in 2008. FEWS NET's work has been based on a 25% increase in food prices, due to rising prices in Mali, a country also deeply affected by irregularity of rainfall. The CSA, WFP, and the NGO ACF organized a market survey initiated in November 2011 to determine the effects of drought on their operations.

The study also notes an increasing rural exodus to cities. Seasonal migration to urban centers began two to three months earlier than usual in 2011 due to food scarcity and lack of resources, and this with a higher number of migrants. The study found that revenue accrued from migration to cities does not cover the food deficits of the poorest households supported. Traditionally migrants tended to save money and send it back to villages, but now they are not making enough to provide remittances. Given the limited options, household food consumption has been critically reduced.

The agropastoral areas of eastern and southern Mauritania are experiencing chronic food insecurity, which is particularly marked during the period of seasonal food shortages from April to September. It is expected that food shortages caused by the recent drop in food production will exacerbate already high malnutrition rates. In the last survey conducted by SMART in July 2011, 20% of children under the age of five suffer from stunting and 11.94% of Mauritania's children suffer from acute malnutrition.

Before the drought, in July 2011 rates of acute malnutrition (GAM) exceeded the threshold of 15% in the regions of Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimaka, and Assaba. The survey found that the main causes of malnutrition include: i) inadequate access to food; ii) inadequate practices of infant feeding; iii) inadequate care practices for infants, young children, and pregnant and lactating women; iv) inadequate access to health services; and v) limited access of women to education and nutritional information. These factors are exacerbated by climate shocks and inter-annual variability of food resources. Given the severity of the current food crisis, the nutritional situation deserves close monitoring, as nutritional status will likely continue to deteriorate.

\*This piece is an excerpt from a larger report submitted to the World Bank in 2012.