

## **Concept note for Institutionalizing Food Security Outlook Forums**

To be lead by (AU) DREA and NEPAD with technical assistance from WFP and IRI

### **Objective**

In Sub-Saharan Africa climate variability and extreme weather events such as droughts, excessive rains and floods are among the main hazards affecting agricultural productivity and hence rural household food security. A failure of the rainy season is directly linked to agricultural failure reducing food availability at household level as well as limiting rural employment possibilities. Climate forecasts on possible droughts and food shortages should help governments and humanitarian agencies plan ahead so that a timely humanitarian assistance could be provided. Farmers and national decision makers can also their food policy such as those related to import export of food or the allocation of resources. In an attempt to use climate information and forecasts more effectively to support climate sensitive services, Climate Outlook Forums have been regularly organized. There is a need to create a forum for linking the Climate Outlook Forum with food security analysis or establish a Food Security Outlook Forum at the beginning of the agricultural season with a lead time to decisions before the failure of crops.

The main objective of the **Food Security Outlook Forum** at a regional level (IGAD, SADC and CILSS) is to enhance the use of climate information for food security analysis and information exchange between national governments, UN agencies, donors and other relevant food security institutions. Even though the food security outlook forum will be led by the food security community, the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), the SADC Drought Monitoring Centre Harare (DMCH) and the African Centre for Meteorological Applications in Development (ACMAD) for CILSS will play key roles in linking climate outlook with food security. Building consensus on food security outlook at a regional level could enhance regional collaboration on the various food security response options and mechanisms. Such information could be an input to both regional and national level food security early warning that could trigger contingency planning exercises for areas expecting food shortages.

### **Background**

Severe climate related hazards such as droughts and floods during the last three decades have led to disasters such as wide spread food insecurity and famine, loss of livestock and productive assets, as well as extensive population displacements including migration . In many areas the problem of drought and floods are compounded by political insecurity further complicating the food security situation.

In response to the severity and frequency of the climate related hazards, in Africa, a number of studies have been undertaken to understand the causes of extreme weather events in order to better predict them so that timely action could be taken. Since 1998 there has been a concerted regional and international effort to use and link climate information with practical application in food security monitoring and early warning systems. In the late 1990s, the Regional Drought Monitoring Centres were established. The centers and ACMAD have provided seasonal forecasts through the

Regional Climate Outlook Forums (RCOFs) through SARCOF (southern Africa), GHACOF (Greater Horn of Africa) and PRESAO (West Africa). The main purpose of these forums is to generate seasonal consensus forecasts by bringing together climate forecasters and by facilitating cooperation and dissemination of climate information in their respective regions. RCOFs have been organized jointly by the regional meteorological institutions, World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Research Institute for climate and Society (IRI) with funding support from donor agencies.

Participants and contributors to the RCOF include representatives of the National Meteorological Services from member states, climate scientists and other experts from national, regional and international institutions, NGOs and UN agencies involved in food security such as WFP and FAO. Currently there are discussions on the formation of Food Security Outlook Forum (FSOF) linked to the COFs which would focus mainly on the forecast implications on food security. At the continental level FSOF could be led by the African Union and NEPAD and provide the required political commitment at the highest level.

## **Justification**

Regional droughts that affect several countries simultaneously have wider implications on food security. The failure of harvest reduces surpluses for the market constraining regional trade that could lead to inflation in the region. Adequate resources may not be available to provide humanitarian assistance if several countries are affected at the same time. It is important to identify the frequency of drought occurrence but also the scale of geographical coverage.

Through various regional and international collaboration initiatives seasonal forecasts are being developed which have practical applications to food security early warning systems. Seasonal forecasts can help decision-makers such as agricultural planners to advise on seasonal agricultural strategy (planting schedules, fertilizer distribution, seed choice etc), future food and marketing needs, further grazing areas for livestock etc, and also external agencies to assess food security and relief food requirements. In addition, information on possible disasters will give decision makers, government officials, donors and NGOs a lead time to prepare and mobilize adequate resources to respond to the anticipated food crisis. Seasonal forecasts could help farmers to make informed decisions. At the start of the agricultural season farmers can use the forecasts to make critical investment decisions such as how much land to prepare and how much to spend on agricultural inputs.

## **Activities**

This proposal is to initiate food security forums in the three African regions -- west, east and southern Africa. In East Africa the GHACOF forum meets in August and February, is IGAD-sponsored and would provide a good rallying point for a food security forum. There will also be a third forum for the northern Horn of Africa countries in May to provide outlook on the summer rainfall season. In southern Africa there is a single forum, SARCOF, that takes place in September under SADC auspices.

The suggested Food Security Outlook Forums would be linked to COF. However, it should be led by the food security community in the region with a representation from the regional climate community to provide the climate information. The basic idea is that it should be held either during or immediately following the Climate forums which is

normally before the beginning of the major growing season coinciding with the hunger gap periods.

Prior to the Food Security Outlook Forum some of the activities that can be undertaken to facilitate the forum include:

- **Climate impacts on food security reviewed:** At the end of a growing season the climate impact on the food security situation needs to be reviewed and analysed. This requires a close collaboration between climate experts and food security practitioners. IGAD, DMC, IRI, FAO and WFP with National and Regional Institutions need to work together.
- **Food security review for each country.** WFP in collaboration with NGOs and relevant countries to review food security situation including how much food aid has been imported and distributed.
- **Assess current situation.** FAO-WFP to provide information on the overall cereal availability and marketing issues (in out from the FAO/WFP missions)
- **Climate outlook consensus:** At the climate forum climate outlooks for a given growing season is produced. This information needs to be downscaled and linked with food security monitoring and early warning systems.
- **Food security outlook:** Combining current food security situation with the climate outlook a consensus on the outlook of food security needs to be reached.

### **Expected outputs**

Food Security outlook for a given region will be prepared. This will be useful for various intervention options. For example contingency plans could be prepared.

### **Participants**

DREA, NEPAD, Regional offices, Countries, WFP, FAO, IRI and other relevant agencies

### **Coordination**

This initiative should be lead coordinated by the relevant regional organization (such IGAD or SADC). WFP and NRI should support and facilitate the process. FEWS NET could be a potential partner in this respect.