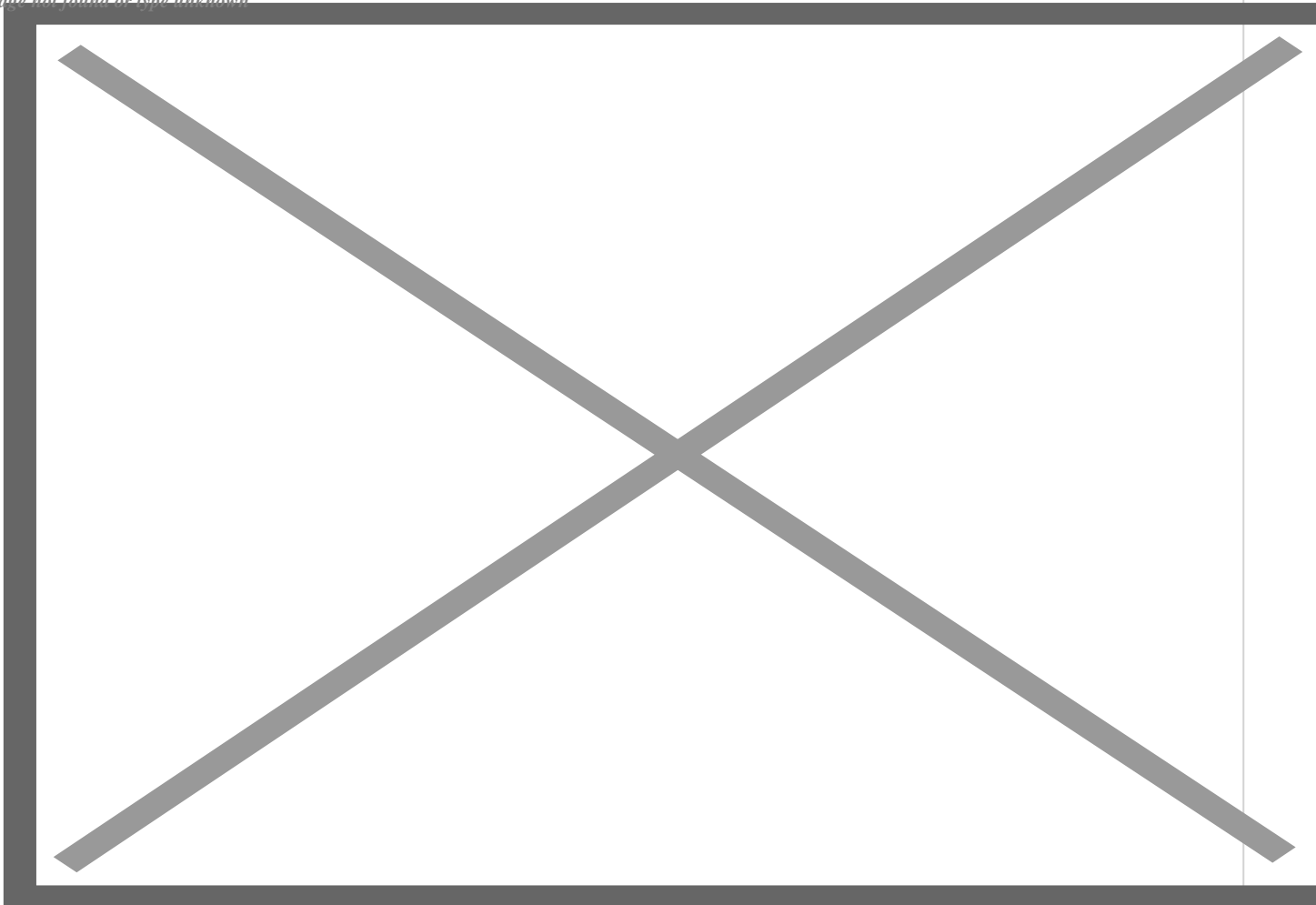


Torrential floods impact food security in West and Central Africa

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Floods have destroyed this season's harvest and left farms submerged in parts of West and Central Africa.

Yaoundé, November 10 (RHC)-- Souloukna Mourga waded through his flooded millet and cotton field in northern Cameroon, uprooting soggy stems that had a few bolls on them. All six hectares of mostly dead

crops were under water. The 50-year-old father of 12 is one of an estimated 4 million people, many of them small subsistence farmers, in more than a dozen countries in West and Central Africa that have seen their crops decimated by unusually heavy flooding.

Floods have destroyed this season's harvest, while nearly 1 million hectares (2.47 million acres) of farmland across the region remain under water. Soil nutrients are being washed away, setting the scene for an even worse crop next season.

Around Mourga's farm in Dana village on the floodplain of the Logone River bordering Cameroon and Chad, hundreds of hectares of crops and dotted huts in hamlets remain under water. "I have nothing left. We are facing famine...the water has taken everything," Mourga said.

Some 300 km (186 miles) north of Dana, it took Bernadette Handing, 37, two hours in a canoe to reach her flooded millet farm in Kournari, south of the Chadian capital. "What I was able to save from the farm cannot support our family for a month. What is certain, we will die of hunger in winter," she said.

Before the floods, West and Central Africa were already facing a bleak food security situation, said Sib Ollo of the World Food Programme.

Conflict in the Sahel region has displaced nearly 8 million people, most of them farmers, for whom the pandemic had disrupted farming. That, along with prolonged drought last year and fallout from the Ukraine crisis – which reduced fertiliser supplies to the region – meant crop output was going to be low.

"It is an unprecedented situation," Ollo said. "This is a perfect storm of factors all playing and leading us towards a catastrophe, a major crisis."

The number of people who are food insecure and need aid in the region was more than 40 million before the floods, said Kouacou Dominique Koffy, head of the West Africa emergency and resilience team for the Food and Agriculture Organisation. Koffy said 80 percent of those recently displaced were agro-pastoral farmers and it would take time for them to return, once the water recedes, and resume farming.

In Nigeria, floods have destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmland, Sadiya Umar Farouq, minister of humanitarian affairs and disaster management, said. In the northeastern and middle belt states, where most of Nigeria's food is grown, crops such as rice, maize, and small grains are lost.

Edwin Chigozie Uche, president of Nigeria's Maize Growers and Processors Association said preliminary reports showed that as much as 30 percent of the maize crop in the two regions could have been lost to floods, warning of possible food shortages. "We have started taking soil samples in areas where floods have receded to check the level of nutrients. It will take some time for farmers to get back to farming," Uche said.

Goni Alhaji Adam, chairman of the Associations of Sorghum Producers, Processors and Marketing for the northeastern Borno state, said the flooding was the worst he had seen in two decades. "We are very worried about farming next year due to the devastating floods. The possibility of not being able to farm is very high, because the topmost layer of the soil, which consists of high nutrients has been washed away, leaving the soil dead".

Many are small-scale farmers that can't afford soil fertility tests and other farm management methods and will not be able to farm next year without support, but even if they get the support, the fear is that this may not be enough, he said.



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