

PL-MAW-813  
(SN-48571)

March 26, 1987

TO: AFR/TR, Bill Trayfors  
Jonathon Olsson

SUBJECT: FEWS Reader Survey

As part of a FEWS mid-project review, a 'Reader Survey' was conducted. The sample was taken from the FEWS Country Reports mailing list which includes a total of 122 persons receiving copies of the reports each month. The purpose of the survey was to poll the FEWS' audience to ascertain readers' perceptions of the country report's strengths and weaknesses, utility, and components needing improvement. Due to financial constraints, nearly all the respondents contacted were from offices located within AID/W, FVD's, and other organizations in the United States. Within AID, persons in FVA/FFF, DFDA, AFR/DCS, AFR/DF, AFR/TR, AFR/OED, and key desk officers were contacted. As well, persons in STATE/INR, STATE/AF, USDA, AFRICARE, CARE, Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Relief Services, and the Office of Technology Assessment were contacted. Persons directly involved with the FEWS project were eliminated from the sample. After three weeks of trying, twenty-two persons (31%) were available for interviews.

Whether the reports are read on a monthly basis (55%), scanned (27%), or read periodically (18%), each of the twenty-two persons interviewed for the survey is familiar with and reads the FEWS Country Reports (see attached). All respondents in the last two categories said that if a crisis situation were to occur (such as in 1984-85), they would read the reports on a regular and more thorough basis.

Several issues surfaced as a result of the FEWS Reader's Survey. Among those contacted, there is still confusion as to who is FEWS primary audience, i.e. whether the reports are intended for Washington-based decision-makers, Mission personnel, host governments, FVD's, or other organizations.\* A few respondents noted that some sort of mechanism needs to be 'built-in' to the reports making them "timely" for policy-makers, while a few other respondents suggested prioritizing factors and making the reports relevant for the field.

---

\*In fact, the FEWS Country Reports are intended principally for decision-makers outside the countries concerned - primarily those in Washington.

The primary audience issue mirrors two larger, overlapping issues concerning the country reports: timeliness, and the role and function of FEWS. When asked if the information in the reports was timely, most respondents answered 'no' (45%), or that the information was only 'reasonably timely' (18%). This response may indicate a misinterpretation of FEWS purpose. FEWS analyzes that which is news; the reports don't furnish news. By analyzing the available information in wholistic fashion, the FEWS reports forecast possible implications of a country's food situation. Indeed, it is the synthesis of the information and the analysis which is news. This distinction must be made.

Yet, 63% of the respondents said that the reports provided them with new, or some new information. It is unclear from the survey results whether the respondents make the distinction between 'news' and 'timely', (i.e., the information is new but untimely; or, the information is not timely, therefore, it is not news). Again, the intent of FEWS needs to be clarified.

The value of the FEWS reports implicitly surfaced in the answers on how the information in the reports is used. Overwhelmingly, the respondents said they use the reports for reference and as a resource for corroborating other sources of information. It is clear that FEWS has quickly 'legitimized' itself as an important source of data (ninety percent of the respondents feel FEWS presents an accurate synopsis). On the other hand, given the issues of 'timeliness' and 'new information' (above), the value of FEWS analysis needs to be made explicit.

Most respondents find that the detail and method of analysis in the FEWS country reports is useful in supporting the activities of their office. The monitoring of satellite imagery in conjunction with ground reports, and the comparison of early harvest forecasts contribute to a better understanding of potential crop production and estimated food balance in "FEWS" countries.

On the other hand, a little over half of the respondents (54.5%) feel that there is really no way to verify the population at-risk estimates. Because these estimates are very much a political issue, the verification process is complicated if not next to impossible. As several respondents said, 'you just have to pick a number and go with it'.

The maps/illustrations/tables are "selling points" of the FEWS country reports. Eighty-two percent of the respondents find the maps, etc. useful, particularly the maps that identify the geographic locations of populations at-risk. Many respondents said that they would like to see more maps; and would like to see more detailed maps, and the use of color.

At the beginning of the survey, it was hypothesized that respondents would like to see more regional information and analysis in the FEWS reports. This proved not to be the case. Forty-five percent of those interviewed said they were very pleased with the "country-specificity" and did not want to see the reports changed. But almost an equally high percentage (36.3) said they would like to see regional analysis contained in the reports. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of one respondent, all the respondents in the latter category are in job positions that deal with "cross-cutting" regional issues as opposed to country-specific problems. Indeed, three respondents in the "no" category said that if they were in a "different" position they would like to see regional information. Responses to this question perhaps reflect the position of the respondent.

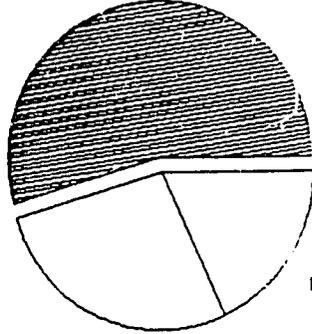
Respondents gave a multitude of recommendations for additional information they would like to see included in the reports. Suggested most often was 'trend analysis', 'more data documentation', and 'donor/PVO information'. But some of the suggestions, again, reflect a misconception of FEWS' purpose. Several respondents recommended including long-term development plans/actions. The purpose of FEWS is to monitor the current situation; and as one respondent offered 'this frees up other agencies, etc. to practice longer-term development'.

In summary, while FEWS generally received "high" marks from those interviewed, a confusion still exists as to the intent of the FEWS reports. The country reports are used as reference and as a means to corroborate other sources of information. Most respondents find that the method of analysis and detail, particularly the maps and tables, are very useful in supporting the activities of their office.

cc: AFR/OED, Fred Fisher  
AFR/OED, Robert Friedline  
FODAG, H. Peters Strong  
Tulane University, Linda Usdin

FEWS Reader Survey  
Do you read/scan the reports?

read regularly 54.5%

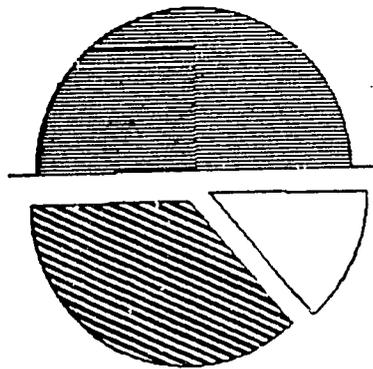


read periodically 18.2%

scan 27.3%

FEWS Reader Survey  
Do you use the reports?

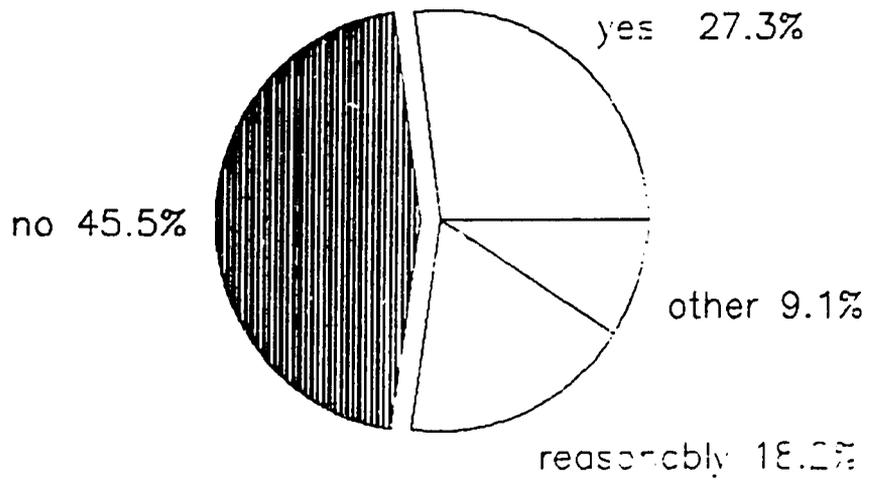
yes 50.1%



no 13.6%

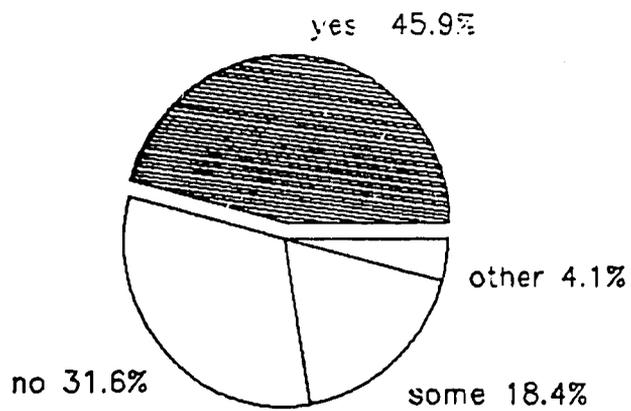
yes sometimes 36.3%

FEWS Reader Survey  
Is the information timely?

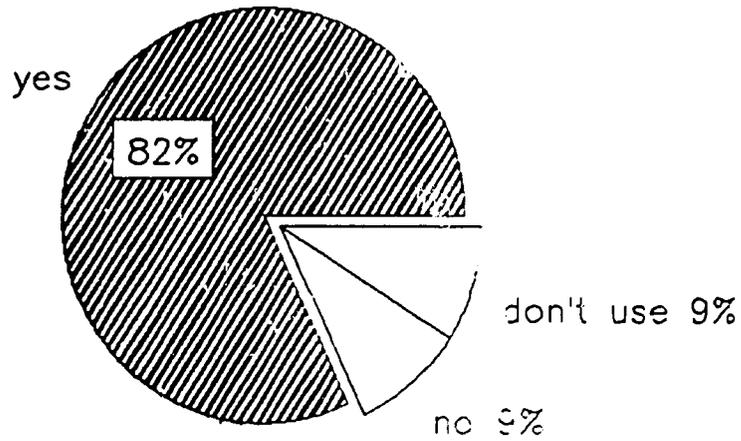


Answers

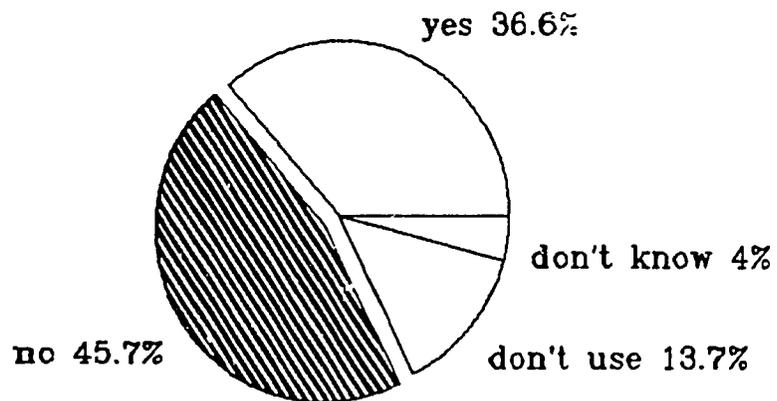
FEWS Reader Survey  
Do the reports provide you with new information?



FEWS Reader Survey  
Do you find the maps/tables useful?



FEWS Reader Survey  
Would you like to see more regional information/analysis in the reports?



READER SURVEY (2nd)  
FEWS COUNTRY REPORTS  
2/11/87

Section I.

Are you familiar with the FEWS Country Reports?

100%

Have you had time to scan/read the reports?

read regularly - 54%  
scan - 27%  
read periodically - 18%

If it were a crisis situation in the (country) would you read the reports?

-all respondents in last two categories responded 'yes'  
-one respondent said if it were a crisis he would not have time to read it.

Section II.

Do you use the reports?

yes - 50%  
yes sometimes - 36.3%  
no - 13.6%

How is/was the information in the reports used?

reference/resource - 54%  
reference to corroborate other sources of information - 27%  
other - 9%

Did report provide you with new information?

yes - 45%  
some - 18%  
no - 31%  
other - 4%

Is/was the information timely?

yes - 27%  
no - 45%  
reasonably - 18%  
other - 9%

Is it an accurate synopsis?

yes - 63%  
some - 9%  
hope so/seems to be - 18%

Do you find the detail and method of analysis in the reports useful in supporting the activities of your office/organization?

yes - 45%  
no - 22%  
somewhat - 31%

Section III.

Do you find the maps/illustrations/tables useful?

yes - 81.8%  
no - 9%  
don't use - 9%

Do the maps adequately communicate locations/localities identified in the text?

yes - 77%  
not sure - 22%

Is identification of the geographic location of populations at-risk useful?

yes - 77%  
no - 11%  
no way to verify - 11%

Are the population at-risk estimates on target, useful?

yes - 35%  
no - 5%  
no way to verify - 60%

Does the monitoring of satellite imagery in conjunction with ground reports provide you with useful information on potential crop production?

yes - 59%  
no - 4%  
somewhat - 13.6%  
don't use - 22.7%

Is the comparison of early harvest forecasts useful to you in estimating the approximate food balance of the country?

yes - 59%  
no - 4%  
don't use - 36%

Is the grasshopper/locust information useful?

yes - 27.2%  
no/untimely - 27.2%  
no - 13.6%  
don't use - 31.8%

Has the health/nutrition data been useful, adequate?

yes - 50%  
yes, need more - 18%  
don't use - 31.8%

#### Section IV.

Would you like to see more regional information and analysis in the reports?

yes - 36.3%  
no - 45.4%  
don't use - 13.6%  
don't know - 4%

What information not included in the reports would improve the coverage of factors contributing to potential or actual malnutrition, food shortages?

What additional grasshopper/locust information would be useful to better monitor the immediate or longer-term threat?

What additional information do you feel would improve forecasting crop production estimates, food requirements?

What additional map information would you find useful in assessing the severity and distribution of the hunger problem; locust/grasshopper threat?

The above four questions were combined -- the question asked was "Is there any additional information you feel would improve the reports, or any additional information (maps, etc.) you would like to see included in the reports?" The following responses were given:

- data needs more documentation (4)
- need more social/health information (2)
- implications need to be explained
- population movements (3)
- cross-border trade
- include imports in food statement table
- market prices (2)
- malnutrition rates (2)
- food distribution rates
- monitoring ports
- more detailed maps (2)
- availability of surface water
- political situation
- famine problems
- other FVO's on-scene/other donor information (3)
- trend analysis (4) (populations at-risk, crop production etc. )
- local gov't plans for long-term development
- water production in drought areas

Several respondents offered suggestions for improvement:

- FEWS needs to issue a one page summary every 2 (?) weeks
- reports should differentiate between 'crisis' vs. 'historical circumstances'
- FEWS reports should look at a "good year" then compare deviations in bad years

- report should be "Alert" for decision-makers (this is what should be watched)-- design a 'fast-track' summary and distribute before monthly report is issued
- prioritize important factors
- compare data to/from other sources and state reasons agree/disagree
- trend analysis should be included

Additional comments:

- FEWS is for AID/W decision/policy-makers; the question is can FEWS make reports relevant for field?
- FEWS useful as database for future reference
- FEWS should cover issues as development problem as opposed to "surveillance"
- FEWS is a useful tool for the field
- Infinite need for FEWS -- to keep close watch on current situation. This "frees up" other agencies, Missions, etc. to practice longer-term development projects
- FEWS project too labor-intensive