

Afghanistan Food Security Outlook Update

August 2012

Well above average 2012 cereal harvest improves food availability.

Key Messages

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock's (MAIL) agriculture prospects report reveals that Afghanistan's 2012 cereal harvest is the second highest harvest on record for the last 35 years. The volume of grain of the 2012 harvest is estimated to be just two percent below the 2009 record.
- Low wheat and wheat flour prices, high agricultural labor rates, and favorable livestock prices are enabling above average food access in Afghanistan during the post-harvest period.
- The United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) October 2010 to May 2011 survey reveals that malnutrition remains high in much of Afghanistan. The survey released in June 2012 estimates that the national prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM), underweight children under five, and stunting of children under five at 17.8 percent, 31.2 percent, and 55 percent, respectively.
- Access to food in extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor is expected to improve in September as the local harvest begins. The local wheat harvest is expected to be near average as conditions have improved following the extreme cold spring temperatures.

National overview

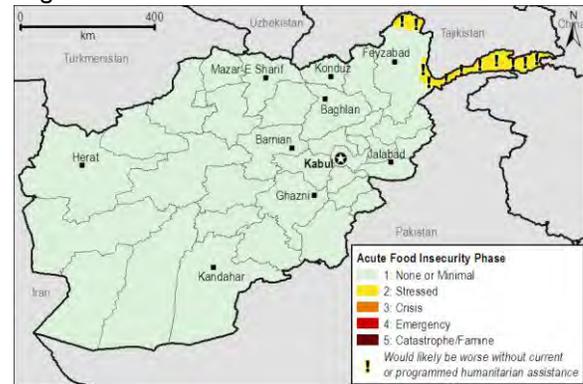
The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock's (MAIL) agriculture prospects report reveals that Afghanistan's 2012 cereal harvest is the second highest harvest on record for the last 35 years. The volume of grain of the 2012 harvest is estimated to be just two percent below the 2009 record. This is likely to

improve food availability and access over the coming lean season. As a result of the larger than usual harvest, the gap between national production and national consumption needs has narrowed to 400,000 metric tons (MT) compared to two million metric tons (2 MMT) last year. This has reduced the need for imports substantially. In a typical year, Afghanistan imports around one MMT of wheat and wheat flour from regional markets, primarily Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

Increased national cereal availability in 2012 has eased economic access to the primary staple foods of wheat and wheat flour. High demand for harvest labor and other forms of agricultural labor such as the planting of second crops has increased agricultural labor wage rates. With wheat and wheat flour prices lower than last year and often lower than the five-year average, livestock prices often higher than the five-year average, and wage rates rising, even market-dependent

This report provides an update to the July 2012 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook for Afghanistan which estimated food security conditions from July to December 2012. The next Outlook report will be released in October and will cover the October 2012 to March 2013 period.

Figure 1. Current estimated food security outcomes, August 2012



Source: FEWS NET Afghanistan

Figure 2. Estimated food security outcomes, September to December 2012



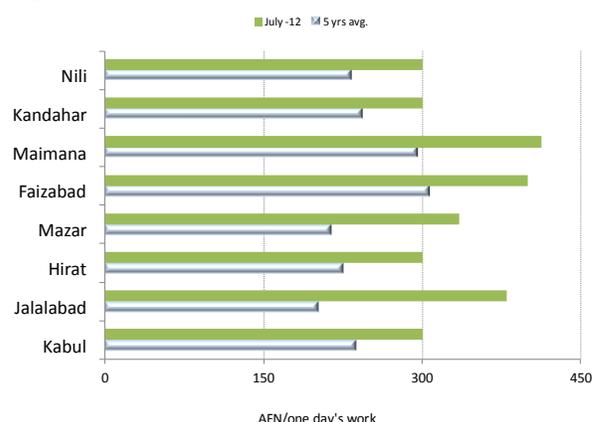
Source: FEWS NET Afghanistan

For more information on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) household group scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

households are benefitting from the above average wheat harvest. Terms of trade between casual, agricultural labor and wheat and between sheep and wheat have remained favorable since this spring.

In most regions of Afghanistan, the wheat grain price is below the five-year average due to the above-average harvest. However, in both Kandahar market in the southern region, and in Nili market in the central highlands, the July wheat grain prices were marginally above the five-year average. These are areas that produce very little wheat, so there may be a delay in transmission of prices to these markets. Also, as little is locally produced, there is higher market dependence in these areas in the post-harvest period, meaning demand for wheat grain is higher. However, like other areas of Afghanistan labor rates were well above the five-year averages and favorable for funding wheat grain or wheat flour purchases (Figure 3). Nationwide, the lower local wheat grain prices will help consumers procure staple foods before the onset of winter in November and should provide both seed for planting winter wheat and supplies for consumption during the winter and the lean season.

Figure 3. July 2012 and five-year average casual labor wage rates in selected reference markets



Source: WFP/MAIL

Over most parts of Afghanistan, livestock prices are also favorable for procuring staple foods. Similar to labor wages, livestock prices in July were also well above the five-year average due to good pasture conditions and fodder availability. The exception was in the Nili market in the central highlands where the July one-year-old sheep price was below the July five-year average. Due to extension of winter temperatures into spring time, the alfalfa harvest in the central highlands was below average. Some pastures have had slow vegetation growth since March due to below normal spring temperatures. Nonetheless, livestock prices in central highlands are likely to increase in anticipation of Eid Qurban in November when demand for livestock typically sharply increases. The central highlands are a key supplier of livestock to urban areas.

In June, The United Nations Children's Fund released the Afghanistan Multi-Indicator MICS results. The survey estimates the prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM), underweight children under five, and stunting of children under five at 17.8 percent, 31.2 percent, and 55 percent, respectively. The surveys for this were conducted during a window which included the lean season from October 2010 to May 2011. The results from the previous MICS in 2004 estimated similar prevalence of underweight and stunting, but a lower GAM rate. No explanation is offered for why the GAM is much higher, but the seasonal timing of the survey could play a role. Overall, the GAM rate is broadly similar to other national surveys in South Asia in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. It is also broadly similar to rates of other poor countries with severe chronic food insecurity problems including Niger, Chad, and Eritrea.

With both own production and market purchases of food being facilitated by the harvest, most household groups in Afghanistan are classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1) (Figures 1 and 2). Exceptions to the general trend include flood-affected households, internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been displaced due to conflict, several areas along the Amu riverbank which are being eroded, and households who have recently been deported from Pakistan or Iran.

Extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor

When last season's wheat harvest failed in September 2011, poor households in the extreme northern areas of Badakhshan Province and in the Wakhan Corridor paid for food to stock for the winter and the lean season by selling livestock, relying on credit, and spending savings. This winter temperatures were well below the short-term mean. The extended winter temperatures and lack of accessible pasture along with the exhaustion of fodder stocks caused livestock deaths in the early spring months. The deaths greatly reduced the availability of milk products which are an important component of the diet from March to October following kidding, lambing, and calving in March and April.

The reduction in milk products and the exhaustion of food stocks during the extended 2011/2012 winter, hampered poor households' access to food. While household stocks were exhausted, extreme winter weather conditions limited the ability of traders to serve markets at higher elevations. In addition, households did not have cash income from milk or other livestock products this spring to repay debts in order to restock household food supplies. The majority of poor households depended on emergency assistance. With very limited food and income earning opportunities, households in these areas are currently Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

The cereal harvest is expected to start in September. Earlier in the year, the low temperatures had delayed planting for the cereal harvest. However, as temperatures increased, the harvest prospects improved, and at present, a near average harvest is expected. With the start of the harvest increasing household food availability, providing local labor opportunities, and allowing households to stock some own produced grain for winter and the lean season, households are likely to improve to No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1). They are likely remain this way into the winter. They will consume a typical diet which consists of wheat bread, rice, beans, potatoes, and some dried meat and milk products such as *kurut*.

While food security outcomes are likely to remain good through December due to the recovery associated with the harvest, livelihoods remain fragile. Livestock production will take time to recover from losses this year. By March 2013, while many households will have some lactating livestock, some households may not, and the overall herd sizes will remain low. This lower availability of milk will become noticeable in March until other food sources such as wild foods become available later in the spring.

Amu River irrigated cereals and oilseed livelihood zone

The vast majority of households of all wealth groups in this zone are classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1). The cereal harvest was above average, and the agricultural day labor wages were 56 percent higher than the five-year average in July. The price of a one-year-old sheep were 62 percent higher than the five-year average in July. However, in some of the northern villages along the Amu riverbank, higher than usual water levels have washed away both agricultural lands and houses. Since this spring, 497 households have been displaced. Out of this number, 354 households were in Kaldar and Shortepa districts of Balkh provinces, and 143 households were in Qarqin and Khamyab districts of Jawzjan province. The villages of Nawabad Bala, Nawabad Payen, Choply Tapa, Bosagha Bala, and Bosagha Payen in Khamyab district have had displacements due to erosion this year.

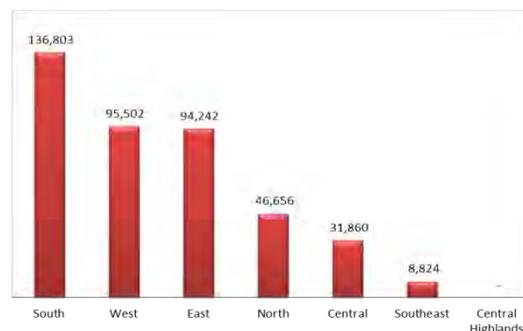
Affected households are internally displaced within the zone and received immediate humanitarian assistance in a timely manner. However, most of will depend upon on external assistance to meet their food and non-food needs until they find alternative livelihoods. Affected households are classified as Stressed (IPC phase 2) until they secure alternative sources of income or new land. The risk of additional displacements from erosion ends in August as the water level in the Amu River decreases to well below the riverbanks.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 413,884 people are internally displaced as of June 2012. Out of this figure 17,000 people were displaced during the month of June. 28 percent of the total of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were displaced during the first half of 2012. The vast majority of IDPs are located in southern, western, and eastern Afghanistan (Figure 4). Levels of displacement are likely to remain high over the remainder of the dry season between now and October, especially along the border with Pakistan and in other areas with more active levels of conflict.

Many in the humanitarian community believe that newly displaced people tend to be highly vulnerable to food insecurity compared to those who have been displaced for longer and had a chance to establish new livelihoods. The primary idea is

Figure 4. Afghanistan IDPs in June 2012



Source: UNHCR

that finding alternative sources of income or locating assistance providers may take time. However, a forthcoming Norwegian Refugees Council (NRC) study conducted in Afghanistan found that the unemployment rate is much higher among IDPs who were displaced before 2009 than among the more recently displaced IDPs. NRC’s study reveals the female-headed households and displaced Kuchi are the most vulnerable groups of IDPs. They are often food insecure due to lower incomes and difficulties in finding assistance. This would suggest that social marginalization plays a greater role in food access for IDPs than previously understood.

In addition to findings on labor opportunities of IDPs, the NRC study indicates that services for IDPs are more widely available in urban areas than in rural areas of Afghanistan. In addition, there was wide variance in the level of assistance provided between provinces. For example, 94 percent of study respondents in Kabul had received humanitarian assistance while only 11 percent of respondents in Kandahar province reported that they had received assistance.

Seasonal calendar and critical events



Source: FEWS NET Afghanistan