AFGHANISTAN Food Security Outlook — February through July 2012

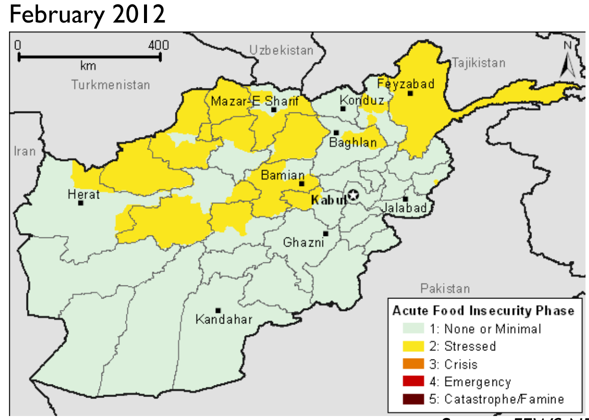
Key Messages

- With the onset of the spring season, food security in northwestern and northeastern Afghanistan will improve from Stress (IPC phase 2) to no/minimal acute food insecurity (IPC phase 1) as demand for agriculture labor resumes and labor wages increase.

- Snow accumulation across the country is above normal, which ensure irrigation water availability for irrigated crops for the coming agriculture season. However, it is not clear what will be the outcome of rainfed crops as it depends on April and May rainfall.

- Above-normal current accumulation of snow and probability forecast for above normal temperatures during March, April, and May could result in localized flooding.

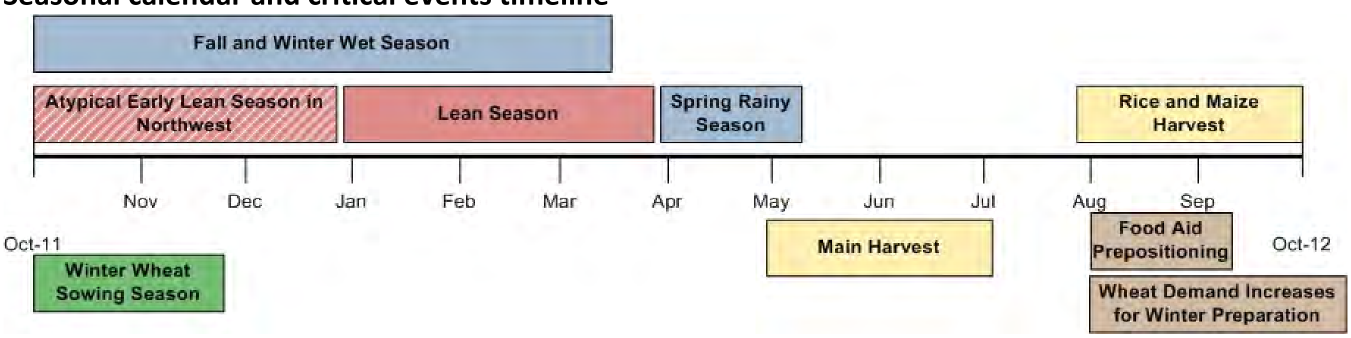
Figure 1. Current estimated food security outcomes, February 2012



Source: *FEWS NET*

For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: *FEWS NET*

Current Food Security Conditions and Outcomes

Following a poor 2011 wheat harvest and limited labor opportunities that were brought on by untimely and inadequate rainfall, food security outcomes for poor households were expected to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in **northwestern Afghanistan** (Samangan, Balkh, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Faryab and Badghis provinces) during the lean season (January to April). However, with assistance provided by the Afghan government, United Nations, and NGOs, household food security in this area remain Stressed (ICP phase 2). In addition to deteriorating food security conditions in northwestern Afghanistan, water inaccessibility was a critical issue in the late summer and fall months of 2011. These concerns have diminished since the wet season began and water availability increased.

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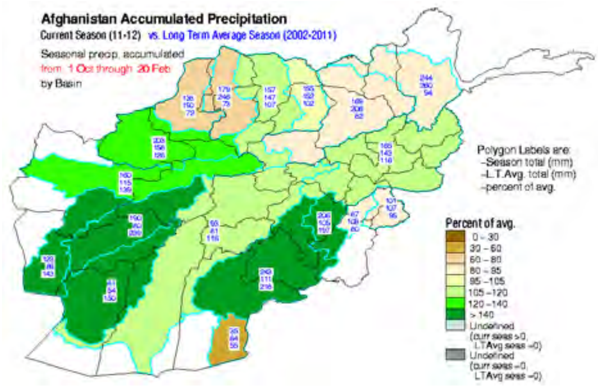
Northeastern Afghanistan (Baghlan, Kundoz, and Thakhar provinces) food security outcomes remained Stressed (IPC phase 2) after the loss of the rainfed wheat harvest this summer. However irrigated wheat farms offered sufficient labor opportunities for poor households to meet their food needs through market purchases. In addition, the good melon harvest provided additional income earning opportunities. Moreover, government and humanitarian assistances were generous, ensuring that food needs were met in the area.

Rainfed zones of **central highlands** (Day Kundi, Bamyan, and Ghor), **northeast** (Badakhshan), and **western Afghanistan** (Hirat) were also affected by poor rainfed wheat harvest last summer. However, the impacts on household food security are limited as the primary source of food is from the market rather than food harvest from the small plots available in these areas. Income from remittances and labor opportunities were reported to be normal this year, further facilitating food access. While wheat flour prices rose to high than normal levels in June, they have stabilized and remained near the five-year average since September. This is likely due to a good supply of wheat flour from regional countries such as Pakistan and Kazakhstan. Currently, households in these area are able to meet their food needs are in IPC phase 1.

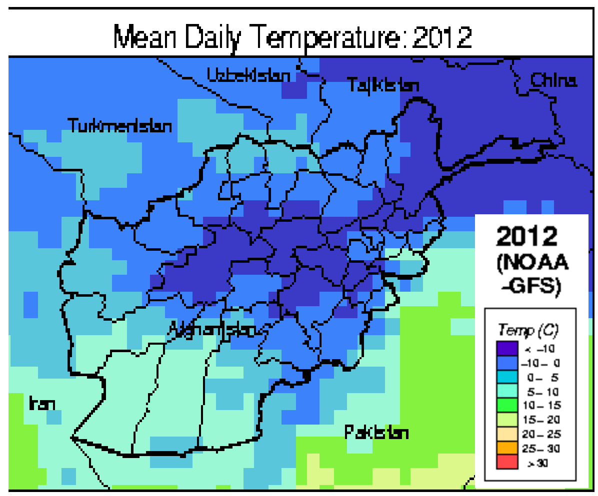
The heavy snowfall in January and February created avalanches that left remote districts and villages in the Badakhshan and the central highlands isolated (see figure 4). As a result local market prices have been elevated in remote districts. This is a normal seasonal hazard, and households typically stock food prior to the arrival of winter to mitigate the risk of food shortages. Households are expected to be well prepared this year as income levels were near normal and external assistances of the government, NGOs and WFP was delivered earlier in the year.

Figure 2. Accumulated precipitation, October 1, 2011 to Feb 10 2012



Source: *USGS*

Figure 3. First decade of February, daily mean temperatures



Source: *USGS*

During wintertime the vast majority of rural households typically rely on food stocks from the previous harvest or food stocks purchased from the market using income earned earlier in the year. Because of the seasonally low temperatures and snow accumulation, there are limited opportunities for households to engage in employment or other livelihood activities during the winter months. In the case of poor households, humanitarian assistances (cash and food aid) played curial role in meeting food needs. Moreover, the smooth regional wheat supply prevented acute wheat shortages and anomalously high prices from occurring.

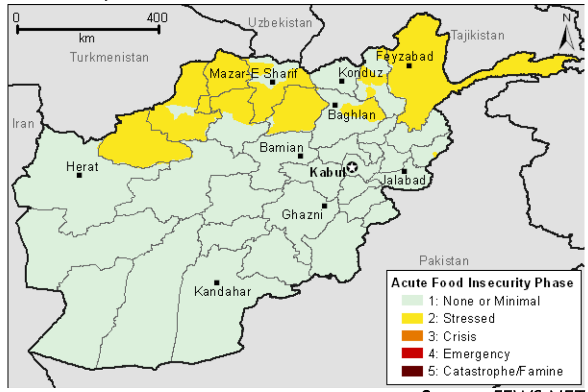
Seasonal Progress

Normal to above-normal precipitation during the ongoing wet season has created an optimistic outlook for irrigation water availability for the upcoming 2012 agriculture season. Most water basins in Afghanistan have received over 100 percent of their precipitation compared to the long-term average (Figure 2). Some minor deficits persist in northern and northeastern basins and a small basin in southeast corner of Kandahar.

Some rainfall deficits began to form in late December and early January. However since mid-January, several storm systems brought heavy snowfall, which has eliminated concerns of a second underperforming winter wet season.

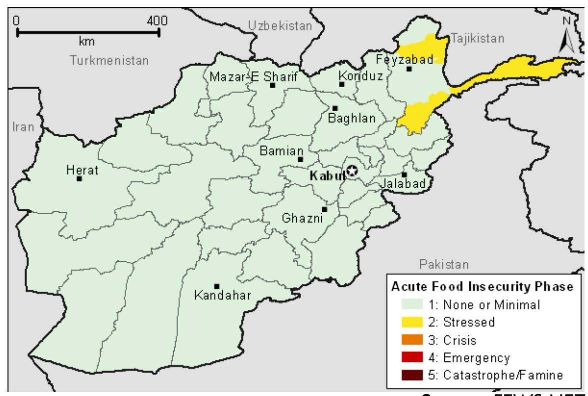
In addition to good precipitation, temperatures have been consistently below average throughout the wet season, which has enabled above-normal snow accumulation in most of the country (Figure 3). Snow-water equivalent models, which take snow accumulation and depletion into account, show higher than normal snow accumulation in most of Afghanistan. Two basins in the Jawjan, Faryab, and Sar-i-Pul area, where there are moderate deficits in precipitation this year, have below-normal snow accumulation as measured through the snow-water equivalent models. This area is mostly reliant on rainfed wheat production, so small rainfall deficit forming this time of year will have minimal impacts for the upcoming agricultural season.

Figure 4. Estimated Food Security Outcomes: February- March 2012



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 5. Estimated Food Security Outcomes: April – June 2012



Source: *FEWS NET*

Market Performance

Compared to December 2011, January 2012 wheat flour market prices have decreased up to 8 percent. The highest decrease took place in Maimana, eight percent, followed by Kandahar where wheat flour market prices decreased by 4 percent. This decrease is likely to be the result of lower demand during late-winter months, as a vast majority of rural households rely either on wheat stocks that came from their own harvest or pre-winter purchase. The increase in food assistance this year may also have contributed to decreases in wheat prices. Secondly, regional trade has been smooth.

Most-likely food security scenario (February – July 2012)

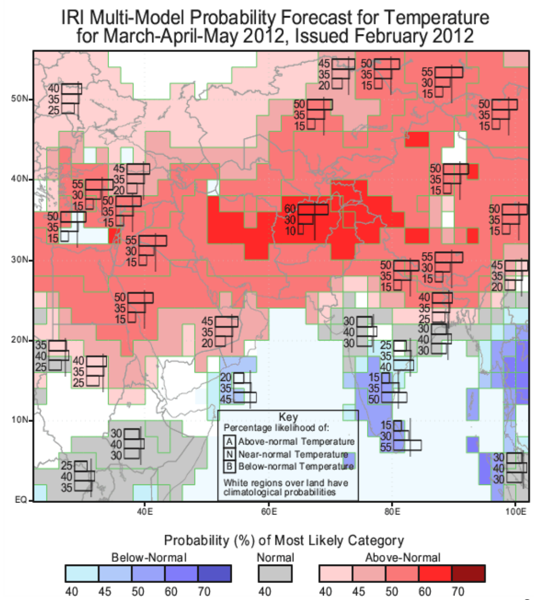
The most-likely food security scenario from February through June 2012 is based on the following assumptions:

- The remaining second half of the wet season will perform normally.
- Kazakhstan and Pakistan wheat exports will continue to meet Afghan market demands throughout the outlook period.
- Wheat prices will slightly decrease with the arrival of spring in anticipation of an average harvest.
- Future military operation and insecurity will not lead to excessive displacement and market disruption.
- Remittances sent from labor migrants in Iran and Gulf countries will remain near normal levels.
- Spring flooding will be localized and will not cause large scale damages.
- Labor wages are likely to increase with the arrival of spring as demand for labor typically increase during this period.

In **Northwestern Afghanistan** (Samangan, Balkh, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Faryab, and Badghis provinces), poor households will remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) until March as they continue to rely on food assistance to meet their food consumption requirements. By April, food security conditions are expected to begin improving as temperatures warm and the winter wheat emerges from dormancy. At this time of year, labor demand is expected to increases as livelihood activities such as animal husbandry/transhumant, wheat and cash crop cultivation, and construction resume. By May, food security conditions are going to continue to improve as the harvest begins and household food supplies are replenished. At this time households will likely face no or minimal acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 1).

Similar to Northwest, food security outcomes in the **Northeastern** Afghanistan will remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) until April as this region is in lean season. However, In March, this region will begin to emerge from the lean season as seasonal labor demands increase with the onset of spring. As labor demand increases and the harvest resumes the terms of trade between labor and wheat as well as livestock and wheat will begin to improve. The improved access to food is expected to result in a large majority of households meeting their food needs without additional assistance, which is going to result in shifting food security conditions from Stress (IPC phase 2) to no or minimal acute food insecurity (IPC phase 1). Even in the worst-case scenario, northeastern Afghanistan is not going to suffer the same level production and income earning shortages as the northwest because of the dominance of irrigated farms that offers sufficient agricultural labor opportunities.

Figure 6. Long-term IRI probability temperature forecasts (March to April 2012)



Source: *IRI*

Food security outcomes for poor households of **Central Highlands and Extreme Northeast** are likely to remain no or minimal acute food insecurity (IPC phase 1) throughout the outlook period. With the arrival of spring (April), food security conditions in this region will improve as physical access to market improves and income earning opportunities resume. Income for households in the central highlands from labor, animal husbandry, diary sales, and remittances are expected to be near normal this year.

There is a heighten risk of flooding in the central highlands this year. IRI probability forecasts projects a relatively high above-normal temperatures beginning in March in the region (Figure 6). With excessive snow accumulation in the area, this could lead to localized flooding and asset damages.

Table 1. Events, which could change the most likely food security scenario

Area	Event	Impact on food security outcomes
Northeast and Northwest	Below normal precipitation during March, April, and May	Poor precipitation during March, April and May could lead to a second year of below normal rainfed wheat harvest, which could result prolonged acute food insecurity.
Central highlands, extreme northeast	Large scale flooding	Large scale flooding during March to May could significantly deteriorate food security conditions in these areas.
Nationwide	Deterioration of security conditions	Deterioration of security may impact trade and supply As well as increase the displaced people
Nationwide	Regional wheat trade	If regional wheat supply cuts off or reduced wheat flour market prices are going to increase which is going to impact access to food