Central Asia

Afghanistan

This country is monitored by local FEWS NET staff

Food Security Outlook

Ample precipitation in March assists normal winter and spring crop development

April 2014 to September 2014

Key Messages:

Given the anticipated average harvest in 2014 for the third consecutive year, along with above-average livestock prices, the conclusion of the lean season when normal livelihood activities resume, and likely stable, projected staple food prices, food security outcomes from April to September are expected to remain Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in most parts of the country.
Poor households in the West-Central Highlands from April to June are expected to remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) as they continue to rely on external food assistance in the absence of seasonal food sources. Food security outcomes from July to September are likely to return to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) with income generated from labor migration to Helmand and Herat provinces; normal poppy and grain harvests are expected for this zone.

In the absence of external assistance for some households or when short-term assistance distributions run out for others, IDPs that are newly displaced from conflict will experience Crisis (IPC Phases 3) food security outcomes, as they are unlikely to be able to secure reliable income sources nor compete for daily wages with those who have previously established connections to the host communities.

National Overview

CURRENT SITUATION

The start of the 2013/2014 wet season was slow with limited amounts of rain and snow from October to January. However, in February, Afghanistan had two snow storms during which the mountains received ample snowfall, though snow depth in lower elevations was less than last year and the long-term average. The extent of the snow coverage extended all the way to the lowlands in Helmand, Farah, and Kandahar after a 35-year hiatus. Crop development for areas with winter wheat planted from September to December was reported to be normal. Winter wheat is predominantly irrigated from water accumulated from the beginning of the previous year’s wet season precipitation. After the first irrigation, winter wheat goes into a dormancy stage for the remainder of the winter. Irrigation water availability was average during this period (Figures 1 and 2).

At the beginning of the new year in Afghanistan (March 21), spring wheat sowing starts and requires frequent rainfall for adequate development. As of March 2014, rainfall has been well-established and frequent, which has allowed for normal spring wheat planting throughout the country, with the exception of the Central highlands where spring cultivation seasonally takes place later, towards the end of April.

According to United States Geological Survey (USGS), January to April temperatures remained predominantly well below last year and the mean, which prevented early snow melt as well as slowing down crop development. The deterioration of vegetation seen in the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI)
Anomaly is a reflection of the below-average temperatures that have slowed down and delayed crop development as compared to a normal year, rather than a reflection of poor vegetation in general (Figure 3).

According to USGS remote sensing data, accumulated precipitation from October through March is below last year and the long-term average, particularly in agricultural surplus-producing areas of the North (Figure 4). However, FEWS NET’s field reports did not reveal any negative impacts on crop development at this stage, particularly given the generous precipitation from March onward, which is the most critical time for crop development and spring planting.

In April, most parts of the country emerged from the annual lean season and the demand for agricultural labor resumed. Along with seasonal labor opportunities came spring livestock births and milk production, which contributes positively to households’ food diversity. The majority of poor households in agriculture-surplus areas of the North are able to carry over food stocks from previous year’s above-normal harvest, while poor households in agriculture-deficit parts of the country are running out of food stocks in April. In order to satisfy food needs until the arrival of the next harvest in the lowlands (in May) and in the highlands (continuing until September), poor households will sell some of their livestock or use savings to procure new food stocks as a typical seasonal strategy. However, the West-Central Highlands livelihood zone is an exception as poor households do not have any remaining livestock or savings due to livestock sales last year to cope with harvest losses. Since mid 2013, poor households have relied heavily on external assistance.

Wheat flour prices in Afghanistan are above the five-year average in all reference markets, as the supply from Pakistan decreased and prices have therefore increased. Regardless, it is typical for this season that wheat flour prices begin to increase as poor households from higher elevations and landless households in agriculture-deficit areas are procuring new stocks. In addition, price hikes are largely associated with international market prices, which have been higher than in previous
years. The annual inflation rate is roughly 10 percent. Markets in Kandahar exhibit the
highest difference to the five-year average (27 percent higher) for wheat, due to it being a
staple food production-deficit area. Mazar markets have similarly observed wheat flour
prices 24 percent above the five-year average. Prices for rice, the next largest staple food
in the Afghan diet, were stable during March, except in Herat where the price rose 6
percent. Compared to last year, rice is up 16 percent in Kabul, while prices were normal in
other markets.

Prices for one year-old sheep remain above the five-year average in all reference markets,
with the exception of Nili market where prices are 20 percent below the five-year average.
This is as a result of low fodder availability from the poor wheat harvest in the West-Central
highlands livelihood zone, leaving sheep with poor body conditions.

Remittances from the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf are continuing at normal rates,
which continue to be a significant source of income in southern and southeastern
Afghanistan.

Natural disasters, such as landslides and flash floods, affected around 2,000 families
across the country during March 2014; the majority of affected households received food
and non-food assistance. The highest numbers of affected families were recorded in
Urozgan, Farah, and Faryab provinces, respectively.

Continued conflict is the main cause of new internal displacement. For the 11-month period
from April 2013 to February 2014, 118,728 individuals were displaced across the country.
These internally displaced persons (IDPs) received World Food Programme (WFP) and
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) food and non-food assistance,
usually covering a 2 to 3-month period assuming the household size does not exceed six
people.

Due to above-average food stocks from last year’s harvest (particularly for Northern
Afghanistan), above-average income in 2013, current above-average livestock prices in
mountainous areas, and seasonally stable food prices, current acute food security
outcomes are Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in most parts of the country. However, in the West-
Central Agropastoral livelihood zone, as a result of exceptionally poor harvests that resulted
in a shift in food sources (from own production to external assistance), poor households are
classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2!). IDPs who have been displaced over the past year
and who have not received external assistance continue to be classified in Crisis (IPC
Phase 3), as their normal livelihoods have been disrupted by conflict within the past year
and they have not been able to diversify their sources of income.

ASSUMPTIONS

- The amount and frequency of the April to June rains are expected to continue at
  normal levels.
- Some June to August Indian monsoon rains will fall in Eastern Afghanistan. However,
  it is not expected to cause serious flooding.
- Imports of wheat flour from Pakistan and Kazakhstan will continue at a normal
seasonal rate.
- International wheat market prices are expected to remain stable during the scenario period (April to September 2014).
- From January to September, remittances sent by domestic labor migrants and civil servants, as well as foreign remittances from the Persian Gulf countries will be normal.
- Seasonal spring flooding is not expected to surpass typical levels of flooding in a normal year, nor have any significant impact on affected areas. From March to May, impacts from flooding will remain localized.
- Pakistan and Iran will not force the deportation of Afghans. However, voluntary repatriation from both countries is expected to continue at a seasonal rate.
- Insecurity will seasonally increase starting in March, after the snow melts, due to favorable temperatures. However, it is not anticipated that insecurity will worsen to the extent that private sector trade or local and long distance labor migration will be restricted during the scenario period.

**MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES**

Households in agriculture surplus areas of the North have carried over food stocks from last year’s above-normal harvest, which could allow them to reach the next harvest without the necessity to buy additional food stocks. This includes landless households as well as those who work as sharecroppers.

Food stocks for poor households in the higher elevations are likely run out in April/May at which point they will sell some of their livestock in order to purchase food until their own grains are harvested in September. As livestock prices are above the five-year average, poor households are therefore likely to satisfy their food needs through the income from their livestock sales. In Bamyan, where half of all Afghan potatoes are produced according to Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock’s estimates, the potato harvest is expected to be normal in 2014.

The poorest households are likely to benefit from the ongoing external humanitarian assistance cash and food voucher programs. In addition, some households will benefit from the government’s safety net programs that promote income-generation.

Due to a number of factors, such as the shift in season beginning around March 21, the Afghan new year, above-average food stocks from last year’s harvest (particularly for Northern Afghanistan), above-average income in 2013 that pays for current food needs, current and projected near-term above-average livestock prices in mountainous areas, seasonally stable food prices, remittances from gulf countries, and an expected normal harvest for the third year in row, current acute food security outcomes are Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in most parts of the country from April to September 2014. Therefore, poor households are expected to meet their minimum food and non-food requirements.

However, in the West-Central Agropastoral livelihood zone, as a result of exceptionally poor harvests that resulted in a shift in food sources (from own production to external assistance), poor households are classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) from April to June. West Central Agropastoral livelihood zone food security outcomes from July to September is expected to shift back to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) as by then normal harvest will be obtained.
and income from internal labor migrations will be available. IDPs who have been displaced over the past year and who have not received external assistance will continue to be classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as their normal livelihoods have been disrupted by conflict within the past year as they have not been able to diversify their sources of income quickly. Since IDPs are spread out throughout the country, representing less than 20 percent of the resident population, they do not meet the mapping criteria for IPC classification.

Areas of Concern

West-Central Highlands Agropastoral Livelihood Zone

CURRENT SITUATION

Like in other parts of the central highlands, in April poor households usually sell some of their livestock or spend some of their savings in order to procure food until their own grain is harvested in September. However, these normal sources of income are not available to poor households this year in this area as income has already been exhausted from coping with the 2013 harvest losses. Poor households have therefore been relying on external assistance since December. The rations distributed covered food needs from December to March.

Seasonal precipitation from October 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014 in this livelihood zone was 70 percent of the long-term average and 98 percent of last year’s precipitation levels during the same period. Nevertheless, rainfall from March onward has been steady in this zone, which enabled spring crop planting vital for this zone. Current wheat flour prices are 10 percent higher than the five-year average, but 13 percent lower than source market prices, such as in Herat. Therefore, the demand for wheat flour is low because of food assistance distributions. Livestock prices remained 20 percent below the five-year average. However, when you compare livestock prices with previous months, the prices are increasing, thus indicating positive pasture conditions and improved animal body conditions.

Current acute food insecurity in the West-Central Highlands Agropastoral livelihood zone is likely to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) in April as poor households are meeting their immediate, minimally adequate food needs through the provided external assistance, although they are still not able cover their non-food expenditures. However, for poor households who do not receive another three-month ration, their current level of acute food insecurity is likely to increase to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) for a short period of time.

ASSUMPTIONS

In addition to the national assumptions described above, the following assumptions have been made about the West-Central Highlands Agropastoral livelihood zone:

FIGURE 5. TOTAL IDPS IN AFGHANISTAN BY REGION, AS OF FEBRUARY 2014
Source: UNHCR
External humanitarian assistance distribution is resuming, covering food needs another three months (April to June) for 8,000 households who received a similar ration this past winter. Due to the lack of fodder, livestock prices are likely to remain below the five-year average through May 2014. However, if normal pastoral conditions return by May, livestock prices are anticipated to increase again.

**MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES**

From April to June, 50 percent or more of the poor affected households in this livelihood zone will be able to meet their minimal food requirements due to the resumed external assistance by WFP, which will offset the consumption gap due to limited incomes and lack of livestock sales by early spring. Some households who will not be covered by external assistance (approximately 7,000 households) during April to May are likely to face a short-term food consumption gap. Despite the expected resumption of normal livelihood activities, households will not be able to obtain income until late May from internal labor migration, namely from the Helmand poppy farms. Thus, food security outcomes are expected to remain predominantly Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) from April to June with some households in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) if government-planned assistance does not resume.

During July to September, food security conditions are likely to improve because by then, labor migrants will have returned from the Helmand poppy harvest and new labor migration opportunities will have resumed in Herat province. In July, poppy will be harvested in this zone and by September, the grain harvest will begin. Therefore, food security outcomes are expected to shift back to Minimal (IPC Phase 1).

**LESS LIKELY SCENARIO FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES**

The following assumption, although less likely than the aforementioned scenario, remains a possibility for this livelihood zone:

- The West-Central Highland livelihood zone could suffer from poor weather performance during April to June, which would result in a below-average poppy harvest in July and a poor grain harvest in September for the second year in row. This assumption is largely linked to the nature of crop development during this period in this zone, which is much later than rest of the country. Precipitation is expected to decrease towards the end of wet season in June/July.

If weather performance is poor for the second year in row, then acute food security outcomes from June to September are likely to worsen to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the absence of external assistance. Given that the poppy and grain harvest provide the main source of income for poor households in this zone, they are highly dependent on its success. However, this year, affected households will not have any coping strategies to utilize and will be completely reliant on external assistance until June 2015. In such a case, food prices would likely significantly increase, while livestock prices further decrease.

**Northern Rainfed Mixed Farming Livelihood Zone (AF21)**
**CURRENT SITUATION**

The past two harvests in 2013 and 2012 in this livelihood zone were average to above average. Because of surplus production, the majority of households in 2014 were able to carry over food stocks from 2013. Cumulative precipitation from October 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014 was between 70 and 100 percent as compared to last year’s precipitation totals in this zone. Despite deficits during the first half of the season, precipitation since the beginning of March was abundant and frequent, allowing a normal spring cultivation and crop development. Also, cumin and sesame plantations were normal, which are a reliable source of income in this zone for producers. Current NDVI suggests poor vegetation development (Figure 3), however this is largely related to the occurrence of below-normal temperatures that slow down crop development during the past three months. Therefore, a delay in harvesting may be expected, but it is not likely to have a negative impact on crops. The production of milk products resumed in March, which supplements household consumption of grain consumption and vegetables.

**MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES**

Based on the assumption that spring rains will be normal, food security outcomes in Northern Rainfed Mixed Farming Livelihood zone are expected to be Minimal (IPC Phase 1) from April to September as normal livelihood activities and an average rainfed harvest are expected, though access to drinking water deteriorates from June to September in some parts of this zone, which will affect household consumption level.

**LESS LIKELY SCENARIO FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES**

The following assumption, although less likely than the aforementioned scenario, remains a possibility for this livelihood zone:

- The spring rains will taper off earlier than usual in late April and May, significantly reducing water availability to the crops and hindering their development.

In contrast to the normal harvest, the wheat harvest in June is likely to be reduced significantly because of poor rainfall during April and May. This would reduce demand for local agriculture labor, a key source of income for both landless households and poorer households with land access. Households would then seek labor opportunities in nearby irrigated areas where the end of seasonal rainfall would likely have a more minimized impact on irrigated yield. However, with more households sending migrants in search of agriculture labor, the supply of labor would exceed the demand and wages would likely decrease. While increased imports would make wheat flour more available in local markets, prices would then likely rise because of increased demand. Rises in wheat flour prices in combination with declining wages would significantly reduce poor households’ purchasing power.

With food stocks on hand from last year’s above-normal harvest, in addition to earnings from agriculture labor during the spring and some saving from previous years, most households would continue to access an adequate quantity and quality of food through...
June. Yet from July to September, households would likely to shift to Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Despite the generally favorable food security conditions in the country, conflict continues to displace households on a daily basis. According to estimates by UNHCR as of February 2014, a total of 654,664 people are internally displaced across the country (Figure 5), 118,728 of whom were displaced since April 2013.

These newly displaced households left their livelihoods, which consisted mainly of animal husbandry and farming. New IDPs receive external assistance, food and non-food items at least once, which can cover food needs for up to 3 months. The available livelihood options for new IDPs are limited to begging, plastic collection for resale, and wages for ad hoc daily labor.

The southern and western parts of the country are home for the largest number of IDPs, followed by the east because of continued conflict in all of these areas. From November 2013 to February 2014, 30,103 people have been displaced, (around 10,000 people per month), which is higher than expected, particularly during wintertime when insecurity is relatively low compared to the summer.

ASSUMPTIONS

- New IDPs will be receiving external assistance at least once, which covers up to 3 months of their food needs.
- Demand for day labor typically increases during the summertime.
- The number of IDPs is likely to increase during the spring and summer due to seasonally increased conflict.

MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES

Conflict tends to seasonally intensify across much of the country during spring and summer (April to September), leading to increased displacement. The amount of labor opportunities also increase during the summer, yet new IDPs are unlikely to be able to compete for daily wages with those who already have established connections to the host community and gained an understanding of the surrounding environment. Therefore, there will be limited ability for those households to replace their lost sources of income and are likely to continue to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food security outcomes after they exhaust their one-time assistance packages.

Events that might change the Outlook

Table 1. Possible events over the next six months, which could change the most-likely scenario.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide, but particularly rural farming households</td>
<td>Poor performance of wet season</td>
<td>If the current wet season does not perform within a normal range, then the wheat yield (particularly rainfed wheat) is going to be exceptionally low, limiting producers’ access to staple foods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationwide, but particularly urban landless households</td>
<td>Political tension increases to the extent that Pakistan bans wheat and/or wheat flour exports</td>
<td>Wheat flour prices in Afghanistan could rise dramatically in response. High prices will decrease households’ access to food, particularly in the highland areas and in the western parts of the central highlands where dependence on market purchase is already expected to be higher than usual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>Pakistan and Iran forcibly repatriate Afghan refugees</td>
<td>The large influx of returnees would likely lead to increased demand of staple grains, increased prices for staple foods, and increased supply of casual labor. More competition, in light of normal demand, would exist for labor opportunities, especially in urban areas.</td>
</tr>
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About the scenario-building process

To project food security outcomes over a six-month period, FEWS NET develops a set of basic assumptions with regard to possible events, their effects, and likely responses by different stakeholders. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to develop scenarios predicting food security outcomes. Typically, FEWS NET reports the most likely scenario.


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