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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC Remote Monitoring Update February 2013

Rising cereal prices and civil insecurity limit food access

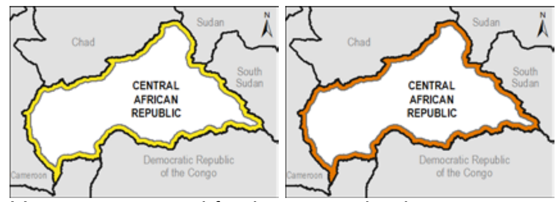
KEY MESSAGES

- Recent conflict has triggered a wave of population displacements and losses to household livelihood assets. This has resulted in heightened levels of food insecurity throughout the country. Central African Republic is currently facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity outcomes, which will likely decline to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels starting in March.

- Despite a cease-fire, there is continuing civil insecurity accompanied by acts of looting and crime in areas occupied by the rebel coalition SELEKA. This has reduced both food and seed reserves and has disrupted markets. Given below-average levels of seed stocks, the outlook for the 2013 cropping year in conflict-affected areas is not looking favorable.

- In general, cereal prices are about 30 percent above the five-year average due to low market supplies. These elevated price levels are reducing food access for poor and very poor households.

Figure 1. Current (February 2013) (left) and projected (March - June 2013) (right) food security outcomes



Maximum estimated food insecurity levels in major areas of concern based on the IPC 2.0 Acute Food Insecurity Reference Table:

Phase 1: Minimal
Phase 2: Stressed
Phase 3 +: Crisis or higher
! Severity significantly mitigated by assistance

Source: *FEWS NET*

These maps show acute food insecurity outcomes in major areas of concern used to inform decision-making. They do not necessarily reflect country-wide or chronic food insecurity outcomes. For more information, visit: http://www.fews.net/ml/en/info/pages/scale.aspx.

AREA	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
National	• A large portion of last season's harvests was either stolen or burned, resulting in below-average food stocks for this time of the year.	• The upcoming cropping season will likely be difficult due to local seed shortages.
	• An effort was made to restore law and order after the cease-fire, but acts of looting and crime continue.	• Security conditions will stabilize, but acts of looting and crime will persist.
	• Current market supplies are below-average and staple food prices across the country are above last year's levels.	• Market supplies will remain low compared with normal seasonal trends. Food prices will continue to rise between now and the end of the northern lean season in September.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JUNE 2013

Fighting between the SELEKA rebel coalition and the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) has escalated since December 10, 2012. A cease-fire was signed on January 11, 2013 which stabilized security conditions although acts of looting and crime continue. For example, some 4,000 metric tons of food supplies were stolen from WFP's warehouses in Bambari and Kagabandoro, leaving the World Food Programme without reserves on the ground. In addition, according to the findings of a joint food security assessment conducted in February, many households suffered vandalism or theft to their crops during the last harvest. This caused households to lose a portion of their food and seed stocks and has resulted in below-average

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stock levels for this time of year. Consequently, the outlook for the 2013 cropping season, which begins in March/April, is not looking favorable in conflict-affected areas. Certain households have also reported small ruminant thefts, which will reduce incomes from livestock and livestock products in the coming months.

Market supplies in conflict areas are below-average for this time of year and poor households are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their physical and financial access to food. With crime and road blocks disrupting road travel, domestic food flows from SELEKA-occupied areas to Bangui and the western regions of the country have been atypically low. Since conflict areas normally account for approximately 58 percent of national crop production, this disruption could seriously affect market supplies across the country. Compared to February 2012, current food prices are generally elevated. For example, the cost of a basket of food items in SELEKA-occupied areas is about 10 percent higher than last year. This same price trend has also been reported in areas controlled by government forces, where the cost of an identical basket of food items food is up by 40 percent. These high prices are reducing market food access for very poor and poor households, and food prices are expected to continue to climb between now and the end of the northern lean season in September.

The conflict has also triggered a new wave of population displacements. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that a joint assessment with Mercy Corps in early February found most villages along the road between Grimari and Bambari (a distance of approximately 100 kilometers) completely deserted due to civil insecurity in the area. The same UNHCR report also estimated the number of IDPs in Central African Republic, as of the beginning of February, to be around 80,000 people.

Security problems are severely curtailing access to humanitarian aid. Certain NGOs are slowing resuming their field operations but U.N. agencies have temporarily shut down their assistance programs in conflict-affected areas. Negotiations are underway with groups on the ground for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor, and U.N. agencies have promised to resume their assistance programs as soon as this corridor is open.

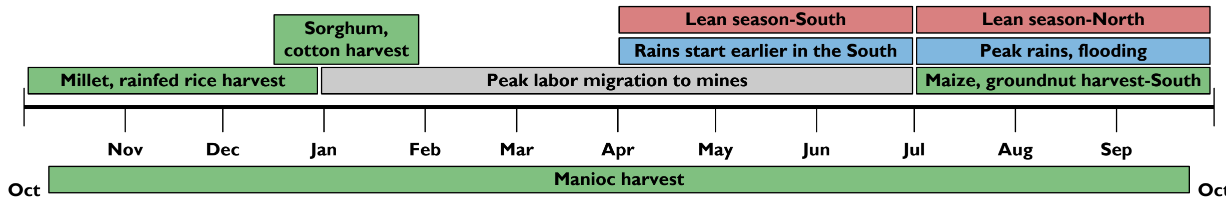
The security situation has also significantly affected labor demand causing the availability of labor opportunities to be below-average. This low demand for labor has, in turn, cut daily wage rates and has weakened the purchasing power of laborers. According to the findings of the joint assessment conducted in February, a worker who last year was able to buy five to six kilograms of cassava root with his daily wages can now only afford three kilograms of the same tuber. Furthermore, marketing activities for cotton have not yet begun in conflict areas as they normally would have by this point in the year, further reducing household incomes.

The current food security situation for households is shaped by several negative drivers including poor cereal availability, disruptions to trade flows, and restrictions on imports from Cameroon and Chad. In general, the availability of staple foods is limited and household food stocks are below-average.

Limited cereal availability and poor food access are making very poor and poor households increasingly reliant on atypical coping strategies such as reducing the quantity and quality of their food intake and increasing consumption of non-wood forest products. For example, OCHA is reporting that, according to the preliminary data from its rapid assessment, 85 percent of respondents indicated that they have experienced a recent change in at least one food source. As a result, households are currency facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity outcomes.

Due to poor food availability, low market supplies, and a steady increase in market food prices, the future food security situation of households between March and June is a source of concern. Despite the Libreville accords, security and political conditions are not helping to create a favorable economic climate, which is severely reducing market and trade activities. As a result, households in conflict areas are expected to have difficulties meeting their basic food and nonfood needs without depleting their livelihood assets at an accelerated rate. Without humanitarian assistance, food security conditions will likely decline and households could face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity outcomes between March and June 2013.

TYPICAL SEASONAL CALENDAR



Source: *FEWS NET*