

## LIBERIA Food Security Alert

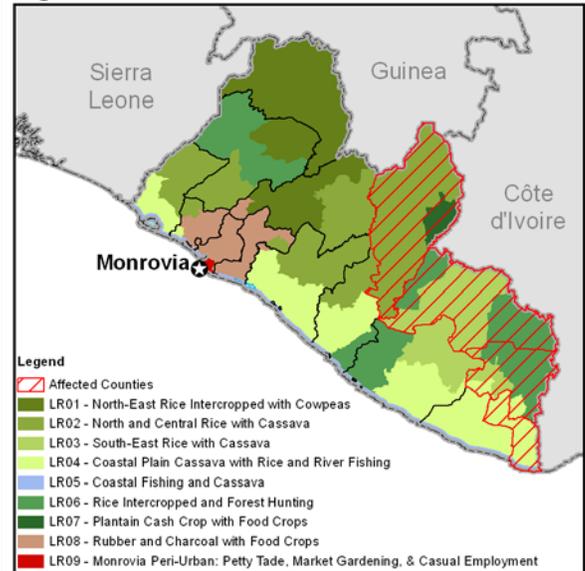
April 7, 2011

### *Assistance needs increasing faster than expected in eastern Liberia*

Following renewed factional fighting in Côte d'Ivoire since February 24<sup>th</sup>, the number of Ivorian refugees in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Maryland counties of northern and eastern Liberia has increased from 40,000 in mid-February to about 117,000 in March, according to official estimates. The upsurge in new refugees has led to further pressure on host families' own resources, market food availability and prices, and sanitation and health services. Donors have not fully responded to appeals for additional resources. Without additional assistance, most refugees and host families will likely face unusually high food insecurity between May and August.

The exact number of Ivorian refugees currently in the area is difficult to know, as some refugees are beginning to cross back and forth from Côte d'Ivoire following calls from local Ivorian leaders and shortages of assistance in Liberia. About 80 to 90 percent of the refugees are in Nimba. Approximately 1,500 to 2,000 of those refugees have agreed to move into the only operational refugee camp, which has a capacity to support 18,000 refugees. The remaining refugees are staying with host families in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, or Maryland.

**Figure 1: Affected Counties**



Source: FEWS NET

Host families are rapidly depleting their own food and cash resources earlier than usual by supporting refugees. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture in February found that host families in Nimba, a surplus-producing area, had consumed about 80 to 90 percent of their cassava harvest and 60 percent of their own rice production within three months of the main November-January harvest. Food stocks typically last seven to eight months after the harvest. Most households chose to save their harvest for their own and refugee consumption rather than sell in the market, which has resulted in unusually low market availability of cassava and reduced household income. In Nimba, rice, cassava, and palm oil prices increased between 20 and 30 percent between January and March. However, River Gee and Maryland, which are chronically food deficit regions with poor physical infrastructure and market access, are showing more severe market stress.

Food security is likely to worsen among refugees and host communities in the coming months. The early depletion of household and market stocks means that most poor households will rely on local markets to buy imported rice and wheat as soon as May, and continue to rely on these purchases until the next harvest in September-October. Prices for imported foods are expected to increase steadily with the combination of higher than normal demand and increasing international food and fuel prices. Households who cope by consuming seed stocks will likely face additional expenditures in April-May to replenish seed stocks. Host communities and refugees are also likely to compete for agricultural labor opportunities and agricultural land, a key source of food and income between May and October. These conditions will likely depress wages and reduce labor-to-staple terms of trade. Already labor prices have decreased approximately 15 percent since the beginning of the crisis.

A Consolidated Appeal expecting to assist 150,000 refugees and host family members and improve infrastructure is in development. In the interim, major stakeholders such as WFP and FEWS NET will continue to monitor the situation through its local partners.

*The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.*