KEY MESSAGES

- In August, acute food insecurity in Uganda continues to be driven by the economic impacts of COVID-19 on household income sources and the impact of erratic rainfall and floods on crop production. Poor urban and rural households continue to earn below-normal income from off-farm income sources, crop sales, and livestock production, which reduces their ability to meet their food and non-food needs. However, the scale of the population experiencing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes has declined compared to June. The first season harvest is improving food availability, while the re-opening of the economy is leading to some recovery in income sources and access to food.

- In the near-term, the Government of Uganda is considering whether it will reinstate some movement restrictions on the sub-national level due to the acceleration of the growth rate of COVID-19 cases in August. Based on recent trends and since second season cultivation activities are already starting, the impact of such restrictions on food security would most likely be highest in urban centers. A rebound in the Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) population would be likely.

- In bimodal areas, the first season harvests of pulses, legumes, and maize are estimated to be slightly below average while perennial staple and cash crops are estimated to be above average. Mixed crop production outcomes are driven by rainfall distribution and the timing of planting. Households in parts of western and northern Uganda were also affected by renewed flooding in August, which displaced households and disrupted livelihood activities. Additionally, rainfall from September to December is forecast to be below-average, elevating the likelihood of crop production shortfalls during the second season. The Stressed (IPC Phase 2) population is expected to be atypically high through January.

- In Karamoja, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes persist due to the delayed main season harvest, persistent livestock quarantine, insecurity, and below-normal income sources. However, sorghum crop yields may be somewhat better than previously anticipated due to above-average rainfall in July and August. Once the main harvest is fully underway in October, replenished household and market stocks and falling sorghum prices will likely support improvement to Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

- The refugee response in Uganda remains underfunded, though a small increase in donor funding is now expected to maintain delivery of a 70 percent ration to refugees through December. Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are expected in the near-term due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on other income sources. From October to January, an anticipated increase in ease of movement and second season harvests will likely support slight improvement to Crisis (IPC Phase 3).
CURRENT SITUATION

COVID-19: Following the government of Uganda’s decision to ease most COVID-19 movement restrictions in late June and July, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Uganda grew by 155 percent in August. Kampala, main border crossing points, and 12 “hotspot” districts remain of greatest concern for cumulative cases and deaths. Due to the rapid increase, which is driven by both local community transmission and imported cases (i.e., Ugandans returning from abroad and cargo truck drivers), the Ministry of Health (MoH) warned that movement restrictions may be reinstated. Cumulatively, the MoH confirmed 3,037 cases and 32 deaths as at August 31, accounting for a case fatality ratio of one percent. The testing rate remains relatively very low at less than 8,000 per million, and efforts to increase daily tests are ongoing.

The most significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated preventive measures on food security continue to include the loss of or reduction in income sources, lower domestic and export demand for agricultural products, and restrictions affecting informal trade flows. According to a phone survey conducted with 2,259 households in June 2020 by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank, approximately 27 percent of urban respondents and 12 percent of rural respondents had stopped working due to COVID-19. Workers in non-farm family businesses were worst affected by a decline or lack of income sources, while farm family businesses were relatively less affected. Since June, the gradual re-opening of the economy has facilitated slow-paced recovery in the demand for and supply of food and non-food items, but these are below normal levels. Stringent movement restrictions remain in place in the 12 hotspot districts. Additionally, some businesses in Kampala remain closed, including arcades; open-air/weekly food/livestock markets are still prohibited in rural areas; schools and universities remain closed; and cross-border restrictions continue to impede informal cross-border trade.

Rainfall performance and agricultural production: Currently, farmers in bimodal areas have completed harvesting first season crops except in northern Uganda and are beginning second season land preparation and planting activities. In Karamoja, green harvests are starting to become available. Another round of flooding has occurred in western Uganda (Bundibugyo and Kasese districts) and in flood-prone areas of Elegu town in Amuru district, causing loss of life and property. Rising water levels around Lakes Albert, Kyoga and Victoria also displaced the local population in Buliisa, Hoima, Nakasongola, and Masaka districts.

First season crop production in bimodal areas and main season crop production in Karamoja vary due to mixed rainfall performance, which affected crop development differently depending on the timing of planting. FEWS NET’s preliminary estimates indicate below-average pulse and legume production and slightly below-average maize production in bimodal areas – mainly attributed to shortfalls in surplus-producing districts – and below-average sorghum production in Karamoja, which is a deficit producer. The production of perennial crop, such as bananas, coffee, sugar cane and pineapples, is above average. In general, farmers in bimodal areas who planted early had better outcomes than farmers who planted late in April. Heavy rains caused flooding near lakes and rivers in March, while a dry spell in early April and the early end of the rains in June resulted in rainfall deficits toward the end of the season in several areas (Figure 1). In Karamoja, planting was delayed and below normal due to reduced access to inputs, flooding in March, and erratic rainfall distribution in April. However, above-average rainfall in July and August revitalized crop growth and vigor in northern Uganda, including Karamoja. This has permitted an extension of Karamoja’s growing season into July through September, though some green harvests are available.

Damage from desert locusts in northern Uganda, including Karamoja, has continued to threaten crop production. Based on reports from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), the damage is contained to localized areas. In early August, a swarm of young desert locusts flew into Karamoja region, specifically in Napak district. MAAIF reports no crop damage occurred due to swift and successful aerial and ground spraying.

In cattle corridor districts, livestock body conditions range from normal to below normal. Despite average to above-average rainfall from June to August, pasture and water resource availability across central, southern, and western regions is below

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1 Adjumani, Amuru, Arua, Buikwe, Bulisa, Busia, Gulu, Kyotera, Moyo, Nebbi, Rakai, and Zombo districts.
normal according to satellite-derived data. Below-normal conditions are most likely driven by erratic rainfall distribution and above-average temperatures, as well as overgrazing in areas where livestock congregate. In Karamoja, the persistent Foot and Mouth Disease quarantine and closure of livestock markets continues to limit household income from livestock sales. There are also reports of increasing insecurity attributed to castle rustling.

Markets and trade: Domestic demand for staple food commodities remains below normal due to school and university closures, low demand from hotels and restaurants, and declining consumption among consumers – mostly the urban poor – associated with COVID-19 restrictions and their economic impacts. Regional export demand is also below normal, attributed to the economic impact of COVID-19 across the region, increased competition with Tanzania given their good 2019/20 production season, and Kenya’s decision in May to permit increased international maize imports. Exacerbating the decline in export demand are COVID-19 preventive measures, which tend to slow down formal cross-border trade flows and introduce risks for traders navigating different cross-border restrictions in destination markets in the region. Informal transactions are far below normal due to restrictions that prohibit bicycles, motorcycles, and push carts from crossing the border and the sealing of crossing points along previously porous borders.

The Bank of Uganda reported an improvement in the value of agricultural trade in maize and beans in June. At the Mpondwe border crossing, livestock exports increased in July despite the ongoing closure of open-air/livestock markets, which is where traders normally bulk their purchases. Despite these recent improvements, trade volumes declined in the second quarter of 2020 and continue to be suppressed compared to the average. Maize exports to South Sudan and Kenya declined by 75 and 37 percent, respectively, while bean exports declined by 15 and 58 percent, respectively, compared to the first quarter. Regionally, maize trade volumes in the second quarter (Q2) of 2020 were 18 percent below Q2 2019 and 58 percent below the recent Q2 five-year average. Bean trade volumes were 22 and 36 percent below Q2 2019 and Q2 five-year average, respectively.

Due to adequate supply and below-normal aggregate demand, retail prices of maize, sorghum, and cassava ranged from near to 40 percent below the five-year average in July in most key reference markets. Two notable exceptions include Mubende and Lira, where maize prices were 6-11 percent above average (Figure 2). In contrast, bean retail prices in bimodal reference markets were 24-44 percent above average due to three consecutive seasons of below-average production in 2019 and 2020. In Karamoja, retail sorghum prices were below both July 2019 and the five-year average, though a seasonal price increase was observed in Nakapiripirit, Kotido, and Kaabong from June to July (Figure 3). In rural and urban markets in bimodal areas, retail prices for other substitute staple foods (e.g., sweet potatoes, cooking bananas, vegetables) were also below average.

Current food security outcomes: Since June, the proportion of households experiencing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes has likely declined across rural livelihood zones and urban centers in Uganda. Food availability and access has broadly improved due to the easing of lockdown measures and start of the harvest season. This is most significant in urban centers, where the re-opening of the economy has facilitated some recovery in household income and poor households are benefitting from declining staple food prices. However, farming households are earning below-average seasonal income from crop sales, based on below-normal domestic and export demand and below-average retail prices. Closure of open-air markets in rural areas is also continuing to affect farmers’ ability to earn competitive prices for their crops and livestock. Although food insecurity remains indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in Karamoja, food consumption is also starting to improve as the green harvest becomes available in southern and western districts.

In contrast, Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are likely in refugee settlements. Most of them are subject to more stringent
COVID-19 restrictions, and the restrictions continue to significantly limit refugee households’ access to sources of income. Refugees typically rely heavily on food assistance, but such assistance has become increasingly critical to preventing more severe food security outcomes during the pandemic. About 95 percent of the refugees living in settlements – which numbered 1,428,961 refugees and asylum-seekers as of July 31 – are eligible to receive humanitarian food assistance. This is currently equivalent to a 70 percent ration. According to the WFP VAM market monitoring system that monitors the cost of purchasing goods comprising the General Food Assistance (GFA) food basket on local markets, the cash transfer value could only cover 81-92 percent of the cost of the 70 percent ration at the local market in Lobule (UGX 27,126), Adjumani (UGX 24,924), and Palabek (UGX 23,901) settlements in late July. In the remaining settlements, the transfer value fully covered or exceeded the average cost of the 70 percent ration at the relevant market. Food assistance remains the primary source of food in the settlements. It is minimally supplemented by own crop production for some households and through petty trade, casual labor, and sales of food assistance rations. Additionally, about 81,000 refugees living in the urban centers received a one-time, direct cash transfer intended to cover three-months’ living expenses from June to August.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

Revisions to the assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the Uganda Food Security Outlook for June to January 2021 include:

- In Karamoja, the short-term GEFS rainfall forecast predicts an elevated likelihood of below-average rainfall in September. As a result, the April to September unimodal forecast is most likely to conclude with average to above-average accumulation. Based on current crop development and soil moisture levels, this is not expected to notably affect short- and long-cycle sorghum yields. However, due to below-normal planted area, production will still likely be below average.
- Based on the updated NOAA/CPC NMME, ECMWF C3S, and ICPAC/GHACOF56 forecasts, the second bimodal rainfall season from August to November is most likely to be below average, driven by enhanced sea surface temperature gradients and the elevated likelihoods of a La Niña event and a borderline negative Indian Ocean Dipole.
- Due to the forecast of below-average second season rainfall in bimodal areas, second season crop production prospects will depend on the timeliness and spatial and temporal distribution of the rains and on farmers’ risk appetite. Varying production levels are expected across bimodal areas, leading to average to below-average production. As a result, the national export surplus of legumes, pulses, and cereals is expected to be below normal.
- In response to the recent increase in COVID-19 daily case incidence, the GoU will most likely reinstate some movement restrictions in certain sectors, districts, or sub regions in the near term, though a return to a full lockdown is not anticipated. Based on past trends, movement restrictions are most likely to affect poor households in urban areas who rely on non-farm income sources, and least likely to affect farming households. Refugee households are also likely to continue to be affected by reduced access to income sources.
- Based on the gradual economic re-opening in East African countries, cross-border trade in staple food commodities is expected to slightly improve in the medium term. However, export demand and the comparative advantage of Ugandan exports relative to Tanzania is expected to remain below normal. Additionally, the supply chain risks of varying COVID-19 preventive measures across countries is expected to increase the costs of doing business.
- Humanitarian food assistance to refugees remains underfunded. However, based on available information, a small increase in donor funds will most likely support provision of a 70 percent ration for all refugees through December. In the absence of more funding for food assistance, monthly rations will most likely be reduced in January.
- As long as schools remain closed because of COVID-19, WFP is expected to continue to deliver take-home meals at the homes of school-age children in Karamoja through September.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JANUARY 2021**

Given the rapid increase in cases of COVID-19, implementation of any movement restrictions would most likely lead to a rebound in the population experiencing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes in the near term, particularly in urban centers. Unemployment levels will likely increase among households in urban areas who work in non-farm businesses, which will reduce their ability to purchase their daily kilocalorie requirements. Poor, urban households who are most vulnerable to the impact of movement restrictions on their daily wages and ability to access food include public transport operators, casual laborers, market vendors, small business operators, and others in the informal services sector.

In most bimodal areas, Minimal (IPC Phase 1) outcomes will most likely be sustained, but an atypically high number of households will likely be Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes remain most likely in flood-affected areas,
where first-season crop losses were most significant. Outside flood-affected areas, rural farming households are expected to have sufficient food availability as first-season harvests conclude in August/September and second-season harvests begin in November/December. However, typical crop sales income that enable them to access non-food items is expected to be below average based on projected, below-normal domestic and export demand. Income from labor in related farming sectors that poor households rely on, such as livestock and livestock feed production, will also likely remain below normal since the reduced demand for livestock and livestock products has increased employers’ operating costs and demand for labor.

In Karamoja, food availability is expected to improve as the start of the green harvest in August expands from southern and western Karamoja to northern and eastern Karamoja. The full establishment of the main harvests are delayed by one-to-two months following erratic rainfall and flood impacts in March/April, and the timing of improvement will vary according to differences in the timing of planting. Peak harvests during September/October are expected to increase food availability and drive improvement from Crisis (IPC Phase 3) to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through December. Household income is still expected to be insufficient to meet their non-food needs, and an early start to the lean season is still anticipated by January.

In refugee settlements, refugees’ dependence on food assistance will most likely remain very high as COVID-19 movement restrictions continue to limit their access to income sources in the near term. With food assistance remaining critical to preventing more severe food consumption gaps, Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are expected until October. From October to January, however, relative improvements in household mobility as movement restrictions are eased in the medium term, combined with the availability of second season harvests in November, will most likely lead to slight improvement to Crisis (IPC Phase 3). During this period, humanitarian food assistance – equivalent to a 70 percent food ration through December – will continue to mitigate but will be insufficient to prevent food consumption gaps. A scale-up in food assistance to restore a full ration and significant investments in livelihoods support are required to prevent Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

### MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES AND AREAS RECEIVING SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE*

Each of these maps adheres to IPC v3.0 humanitarian assistance mapping protocols and flags where significant levels of humanitarian assistance are being/are expected to be provided.  indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average 25–50 percent of caloric needs from humanitarian food assistance (HFA).  indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average over 50 percent of caloric needs through HFA. This mapping protocol differs from the (!) protocol used in the maps at the top of the report. The use of (!) indicates areas that would likely be at least one phase worse in the absence of current or programmed humanitarian assistance.

#### Projected food security outcomes, August to September 2020

![Projected food security outcomes, August to September 2020](source: FEWS NET)

#### Projected food security outcomes, October 2020 to January 2021

![Projected food security outcomes, October 2020 to January 2021](source: FEWS NET)

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

### ABOUT THIS UPDATE

This report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates the FEWS NET’s Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work [here](#).

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*Source: FEWS NET*