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SPECIAL ALERT

COUNTRY: Yemen

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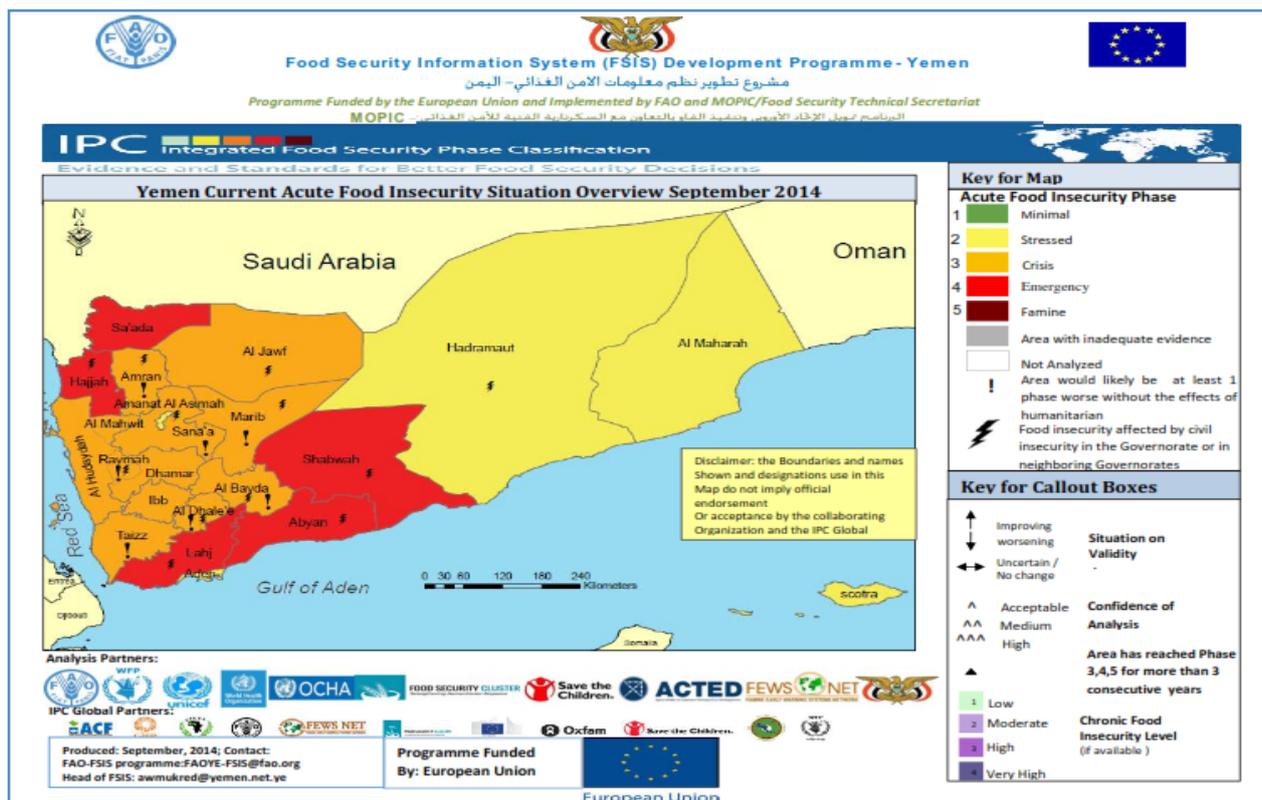
The Humanitarian Emergency Worsens as Conflict Escalates The 2015 Cropping Season in Jeopardy

Highlights

- Conflict escalation and displacements resulted in serious disruptions in market, trade and livelihood activities, exacerbating the already precarious food insecurity situation in the country
- The 2015 cropping season has coincided with the escalation of the conflict thus compromising the outcome
- More than half of Yemen's population (61 percent out of 25.9 million people) is estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance

Shifting political dynamics, escalating conflict and civil insecurity resulted in a power vacuum that brought fresh concerns about the political and economic stability of the country. The food security and malnutrition prospects, in a country that is already suffering from significant levels of poverty, are very grim. The ongoing conflict and civil

insecurity in almost all major towns in the country led to the disruptions of markets, trade and economic activities putting into further jeopardy the precarious food security of millions of Yemenis. The situation on the ground is very volatile. Information provided in this alert is valid as of early April 2015.



The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis conducted in September 2014 by FAO, WFP, Government and other partners, classified five governorates (Hajjah, Sa'ada, Shabwa, Abyan and Lahaj) as facing a food insecurity emergency (IPC Phase 4). Twelve governorates were classified as facing a food security "Crisis" or IPC Phase 3, Hodeidah, Rayma, Al Dhale, Al Beyda, Ibb, Taiz, AlMahweet, Sana'a (rural), Mareb, Dhamar, Amran and Aljawf. Of the 10.6 million food insecure people across the country, about 4.8 million were in Emergency Phase, while 5.8 million were in Crisis Phase. With the rapid escalation of the conflict and insecurity, the food security situation is expected to deteriorate significantly.

Yemen imports 90 to 95 percent of its staple foods, including wheat. The country is highly vulnerable to international commodity price increases and volatility. The ongoing conflict will likely have serious impacts on food imports, transportation network and market supply, and hence prices of both imported staples and locally-produced commodities. Trade reports indicate that owing to political instability, rice shipments from Pakistan have been suspended, with arrivals from India also likely to be affected.

Although only a small share of food is produced domestically, the negative impact of the escalation of conflict and civil insecurity on agricultural production, access to casual labour, markets and income-earning activities would put additional strains on the food security and coping strategies of the affected population. Nearly two-thirds of Yemenis derive their livelihoods from agriculture. According to the Comprehensive Food Security Survey (CFSS), usually held every two years, the majority (84 percent) of the total food insecure people live in rural areas, and paradoxically around 2.5 million are food producers (e.g. farmers, pastoralists, fishermen and agricultural wage labourers) are also classified as food insecure. These would particularly be affected from a poor agricultural season.

Sorghum, the most important crop in terms of quantity produced domestically, is normally planted in the Eastern plateau from late March; followed by the Southern up-lands from early April; and Central Highlands and Coastal areas from mid-April. Wheat is the second most produced crop in the country and the harvest of winter wheat in the Eastern plateau normally concludes in February, while that of the second season in the Central Highlands continues into October. Although no information is yet available, continued instability is expected to heavily impact on agricultural production and marketing. This would in turn impact negatively on food availability, thus increasing the already high levels of import and assistance requirements.

Economic prospects deteriorate further

Oil revenue has been declining owing to reduced production and lower international prices. In addition, several countries and international organizations in the region suspended financial support and aid to the Government.

Consequently, already declining foreign exchange reserves (standing at USD 4.7 billion at the end of 2014, about half of their peak levels in 2008) are expected to decline further. Maintaining current levels of subsidies and salaries in the public sector remains uncertain. Conflict-induced disruptions on commodity supply chains and the likely depreciation of the Yemeni Riyal (YER) are expected to put an upward pressure on prices, despite the prevailing low levels of international prices.

In November 2014, the national annual inflation rate stood at 9.5 percent, up from 5.8 percent in May 2014, its lowest level since December 2012. Increases in inflation, especially food inflation, are expected to increase further reducing the purchasing power of a large number of the population. Moreover, millions of poor households who relied on the suspended crucial social welfare/safety net programmes, including public works and budgetary support implemented by the World Bank and the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), would be seriously affected.

Food and fuel prices increase

The ongoing conflict is reported to have restricted the flow of commodities in some governorates like Al Bayda and Shabwa. In addition, restricted movements in the border areas with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia curbed the flow of people and goods to and from Sa'ada and Hajja.

Since the latest escalation of the conflict in March 2015, food and fuel prices began to increase. Reports indicate that in Hodeidah food prices doubled and fuel prices quadrupled. Most of the shops in the high-conflict areas in Aden and Al Dhale remain closed.

Continuous disruptions in electric power supply and severe shortage or absence of fuel and cooking gas were reported. The supply of food items from wholesalers has also become limited resulting in rationing. Available food stocks are running out as replenishments get scarcer. The worst affected areas are reported to be the southern cities of Aden, Albayda, Shabwa, Lahaj, Ibb and Haidramout due mainly to the fierce fighting between rival groups.

Nearly 16 million people in need of humanitarian assistance

After decades of chronic under-development and socio-economic crisis, 15.9 million people, over 60 percent of the population, are now estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. Children and women have been hardest hit. Political instability, exacerbated by ongoing conflict in the north and south of the country, means millions of Yemenis have little access to Government services and support. Many people do not have access to clean water and are struggling to feed themselves and their families. Basic service infrastructure is near collapse; with fewer and fewer people able to access life-saving assistance, basic health care and education.

A WFP Operation shifting from relief assistance to recovery and resilience to promote food and nutrition security replaced the previous Emergency Operation. Between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2016, it will assist many of Yemen's severely food-insecure people through unconditional household food or cash distributions, conditional participatory food assistance activities,

nutritional support for the treatment and prevention of acute and chronic malnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies, and meals and take-home rations for school children to improve attendance, nutrition and learning. At the same time, WFP responds to the emergency humanitarian needs through unconditional and conditional food assistance and cash transfers to affected populations. Urgent mobilization of resources is needed for safety nets.

Even before the current escalation of the conflict, Yemen was in dire need of support to strengthen the agricultural sector. In such a challenging environment, FAO and partners have sought to diversify and strengthen rural livelihoods by distributing crop production packages, home gardening kits and fishery inputs. Vaccinated poultry and goats for backyard livestock production were also provided. With the deterioration of the security situation FAO is gearing-up to redouble its effort to ensure that as many farmers as possible are able to plant this cropping season and strengthen their ability to withstand future shocks. Increased funding is therefore required to facilitate the implementation of these activities.

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