FEWS NET
FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS NETWORK

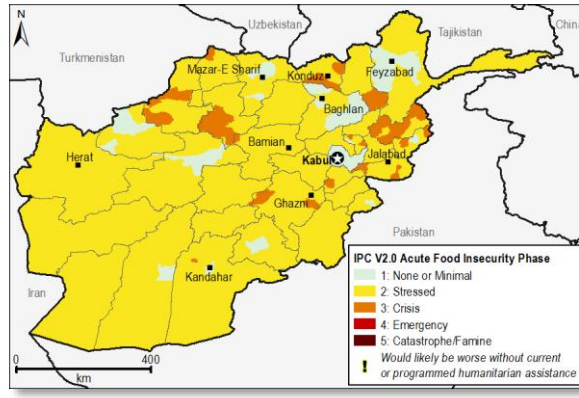
AFGHANISTAN Food Security Outlook Update — December 2015

Rainfall and snowfall have been above-average in most parts of Afghanistan

KEY MESSAGES

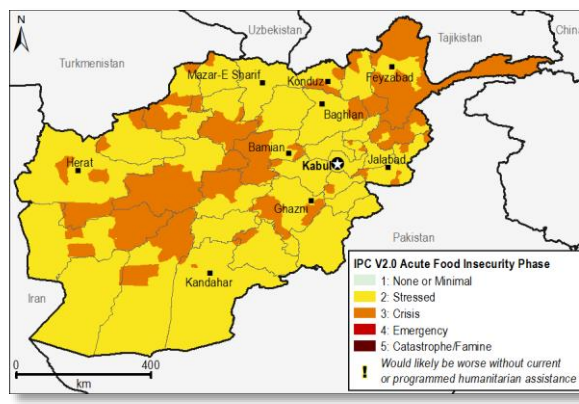
- Since the start of the wet season in October, rainfall and snowfall amounts have been above average. With continued above-average precipitation expected during the ongoing El Niño, there is an increasing likelihood of another average to above-average grain harvest in 2016, further increasing households and market supplies and helping keep staple food prices mostly stable.
- With staple food prices remaining well above average, fewer labor opportunities, especially in construction, since the withdrawal of NATO in 2014, and continued conflict, more people are likely to be acutely food insecure in Afghanistan this coming January to April lean season than in most recent years. However, the number will be similar in scope to last year.
- The lean season will start, as expected in January and continue through April or later in higher elevation areas. During this time, incomes are at their seasonal low point, and most areas of the country will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through at least March. However, in the higher elevation areas, as the January to May lean season sets in, extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor are likely to move into Crisis (IPC Phase3) in February.

Figure 1. Projected food security outcomes, December 2015



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 2. Projected food security outcomes, January to March 2016



Source: *FEWS NET*

This map represents acute food insecurity outcomes relevant for emergency decision-making. It does not necessarily reflect chronic food insecurity. To learn more about this scale, click here.

CURRENT SITUATION

- Cumulative precipitation from October 1 through December 10 was above the 2002-2011 average throughout most of the country. While up to 140 percent of average in some eastern areas, the northeastern region was drier and closer to average.
- Winter wheat planting started in September, and it is continuing in most areas. As of early December, an estimated 60 to 70 percent of average area for irrigated and rainfed winter wheat area had been planted. Fairly heavy rains in some areas in October and November and continued availability of irrigation water facilitated planting. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) is distributing 60,000 metric tons (MT) of subsidized, certified, improved wheat seeds in all provinces. As many as 120,000 farmers are buying up to 50 kilograms (kg) of the improved seeds at only 40 percent of the market value.
- 476,559 people have been displaced from their homes since January 2015 as of the end of November 2015, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As they have lost valuable assets with which to earn a living and access to labor opportunities from their local social networks, most of the displaced are acutely food insecure.

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The more than 476,599 people displaced this year are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), while a large number of people displaced in previous years are likely still Stressed (IPC Phase 2).

- In November, the national-average sheep-to-wheat terms of trade (ToT), a proxy for purchasing power for pastoral, agropastoral, and mixed farming households, was that the sale of a one-year old live female sheep could buy 233 kg of wheat. This was 13 percent below the five-year average. From October to November, sheep-to-wheat terms of trade were fairly stable in all monitored markets.
- The national average casual labor wage-to-wheat terms of trade (ToT) remained steady from October to November at 11.2 kg of wheat earned per day of labor worked. However, this was 24 percent below the five-year average.
- In **Kunduz Province,** intense fighting in September disrupted the harvest in some areas. Along the front lines, households were unable to hire labor, and typically, many people travel to Kunduz to work in September during the rice and cotton harvests. Kunduz town is a center for marketing of food, as the area produces a surplus of wheat, rice, and horticultural crops. However, since the government has retaken Kunduz town, the main urban markets are again functional, both for retail trade to town residents and for trade between different parts of Afghanistan. Fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat, along with staple foods are readily available. As would be expected, prices in November had returned to expected levels, with wheat and wheat flour being less than the national average, while processed goods such as rice, salt, and vegetable oil are near national average prices, reflecting integration with markets in the rest of Afghanistan.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

Most assumptions used to develop FEWS NET's most likely scenario for October 2015 to March 2016 remain unchanged. However, the following assumptions have been modified:

- The October 2015 to May 2016 wet season is expected to continue to have above-average precipitation, associated with the ongoing El Niño.
- Due to forecasts for above average precipitation and above-average temperatures, there will likely be more flooding than usual during the spring in 2016 from February to May, as is expected during El Niño.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MARCH 2016

Winter wheat planting continues through the end of December, but this is the last source of agricultural labor opportunities in most of the country. As both agricultural labor and construction labor opportunities will be mostly unavailable by January, the lean season will start. Households will consume food primarily from their stocks or make purchases primarily from savings from earlier in the year or from year-round sources of income such as formal employment with various branches of the government including the military, the police, or, in some cases, remittances.

Like the wet season has been thus far, precipitation is likely to continue to be a bit above-average due to the ongoing El Niño. With adequate rainfall and snowfall, pasture conditions in the spring will likely be slightly better than usual, leading to slowly improving livestock body conditions in February and March. At the same time, many livestock will calve, kid, or lamb at this time, increasing herd sizes. Milk availability and income from livestock or livestock product sales will increase food access, starting in February in some lowland areas and increasing through the spring in May in the highlands. Access to labor opportunities will also seasonally resume, helping to slowly move households into buying food again, instead of relying primarily on their own stocks.

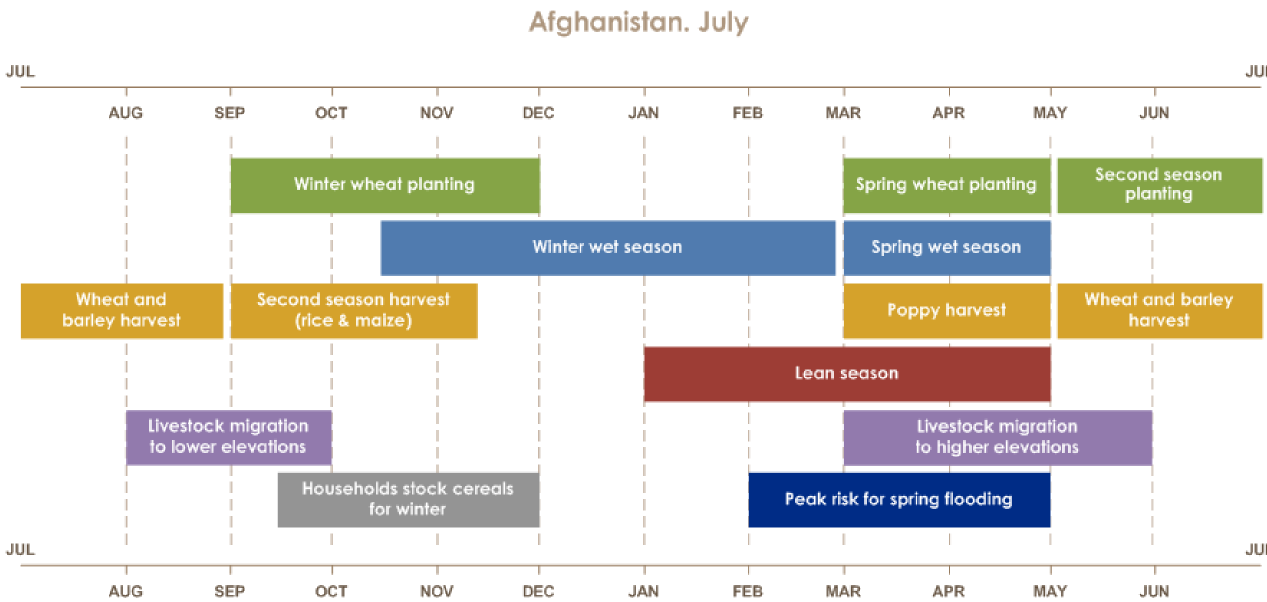
Wheat grain and flour prices are likely be mostly stable through May. Many rural households will have little demand for market purchases as they consume their stocks. Traders are expected to import from traditional sources such as Kazakhstan and Pakistan. Also, under a new intergovernmental agreement, the private sector is expected to start to import wheat and wheat flour from Turkmenistan. These imports will continue to meet domestic demand.

With continued conflict and displacement due to insecurity, seasonally increasing food prices, especially for milk, fruit, vegetables, and other perishable foods, the difficulty of road access for trade or providing humanitarian assistance, and increasing incidence acute respiratory infections (ARI) during the winter, acute malnutrition prevalence is likely to seasonally, slightly increase between January and March.

In the absence of additional humanitarian assistance and reintegration into local economies, IDPs are expected to remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

From January to May 2016, many areas of the country are anticipated to remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2). However, conflict and less market access will characterize some area of the country. In these areas, including parts of Badakhshan, Nuristan, Bamyan, Daykundi, Badghis, Hilmand, Zabul, Ghor, and some districts of Nanagarhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar, Kandahar, and Farah Provinces, more households will move into Crisis (IPC Phase 3) from January to March during the lean season.

SEASONAL CALENDAR IN A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

ABOUT THIS UPDATE

This monthly report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates FEWS NET's quarterly Food Security Outlook. Learn more about our work here.