A Monthly Newsletter on Food Security and Vulnerability in Uganda

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Acknowledgement of contributions from District Officers; Commercial Traders (Kampala); Uganda Department of Meteorology; Market Information Service/International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and non-government organizations.

Summary

Nearly one million IDPs in northern and eastern Uganda face moderate to high food insecurity and lack basic services. This situation is likely to deteriorate further because of reduced resources and a projected 36,000 MT shortcoming, between September 2003 and March 2004, in supplies to the World Food Programme's pipeline for IDPs and over 800,000 other vulnerable people.

Normal second season cultivation is currently underway alongside the delayed harvest of cereal crops in key producing areas. About 40 percent of the maize crop is yet to be harvested. Approximately 250,000 to 300,000 MT are expected from the current harvest; Kapchorwa in eastern Uganda is expected to contribute an additional 40,000 to 50,000 MT when its long cycle crop is harvested, beginning in October. National bean production was about 100,000 MT for the first season harvest.

Maize prices finally declined in August as the harvest intensified. However, prices generally remain higher than the average for the last two years, indicating continued lower purchasing power. Significant local and regional demand are keeping the price of maize high, encouraging trade in the commodity despite quality limitations mainly attributed to high moisture content. There have been significant flows of maize to Kenya since July 2003.

1.0 Imminent Break in Food Supplies to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); Promising Food Prospects for the rest of the country.

Overall, civil security remains uncertain in Gulu, Kitgum, Pader Districts and parts of Lira District in northern Uganda where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continues sporadic attacks on communities and road convoys. At least 750,000 people are displaced and now live in several protected settlements in the four districts. New incursions of the LRA since mid-2003 into Kaberamaido, Katakwi and Soroti Districts in eastern Uganda have expanded the civil insecurity problem, resulting in additional displacement of close to 240,000 people from their households. The combined figure of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is now nearly one million (Figure 1).

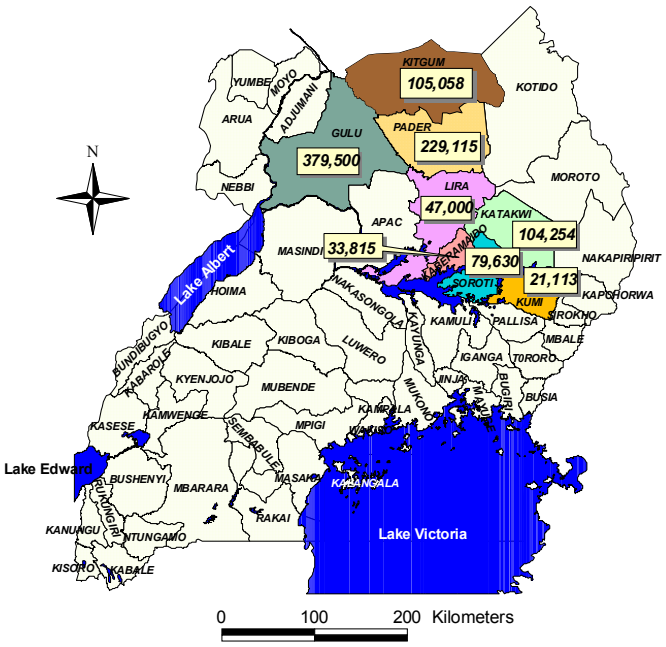
A majority of the displaced people suffer moderate to high food insecurity and malnutrition rates are high in children under five years of age. Most of the IDPs have very limited access to adequate food, health, water, sanitation and other basic services. Several indigenous and international humanitarian organizations are active in the districts, providing assistance to the IDPs. WFP provides over 90 percent of the IDPs' food needs. Insecurity on the roads, however, continues to hamper humanitarian responses to the internally displaced.

Low production in the first season has increased the IDPs' risk of food insecurity and diminished the likelihood of any improvement in their food access over the next four to six months. As a result, there is an increasing need for external food and other assistance to mitigate negative impacts on their health, nutrition and assets over the long term. This assistance would ensure the IDPs retain ability to regain productive lives when they return to their homes.

The UN World Food Programme estimates a shortfall of approximately 36,000 MT of food aid for its operations in Uganda between September 2003 and March 2004. The agency, which provides food to nearly one million IDPs and over 800,000 drought-affected persons and Rwandan and Sudanese refugees under its Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 10121.0, projects serious pipeline breaks in November and December 2003, and it is projected that there will not be any cereals to distribute then. WFP also indicates the pipeline will be further stressed by a need to provide food aid to about 240,000 displaced persons in the Teso region (Kaberamaido Katakwi, Kumi and Soroti Districts) in the months before the end of 2003.

Produce from the first season harvest has improved household food availability and access in other parts of Uganda. Prospects over the next four months generally look good with no observable stress. Household food security is improving in Karamoja as the harvests begin; green maize is being harvested in the western wet belt. The sorghum harvest is beginning in the whole region. A normal harvest is expected in Karamoja, enabling households' access to adequate food. The purchasing power of households having livestock is also improving as prices rise or stabilize compared to early 2003, improving their market access to grains. Abundant vegetation and sufficient water supplies have improved livestock access to adequate pasture and water.

Figure 1: Internally Displaced Persons, Sep. 2003



FEWS NET/Uganda, September 2003;
Source of Information: UN OCHA, UN WFP

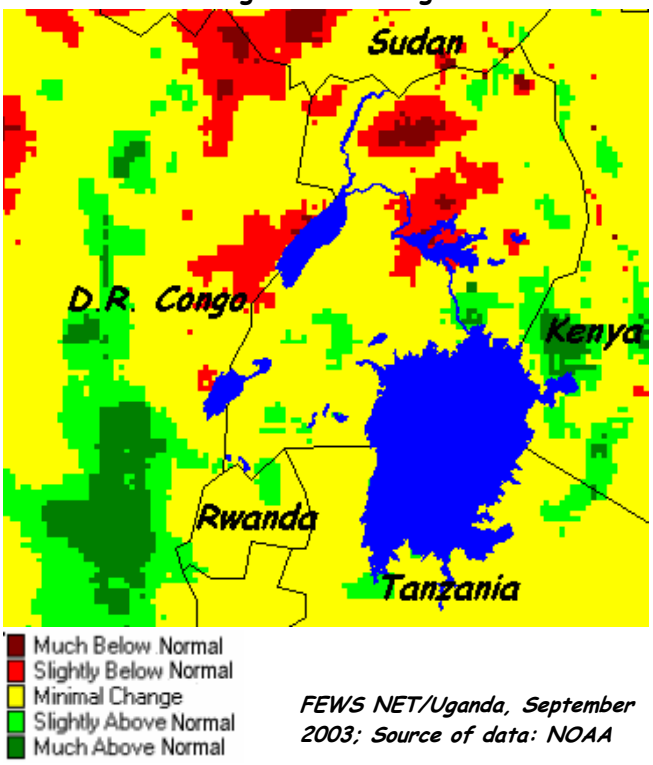
2.0 National Trends:

2.1 Agro-climatic Conditions:

Reports by district extension officers indicate normal rainfall was received in most of the country during August, as the second rainy season began in bi-seasonal districts. Above normal rainfall was recorded in a few areas, mainly in the eastern Uganda high altitude areas. Some parts of northern Uganda received much below normal rainfall.

The *Meteosat* image (Figure 2) corroborates reports and observations of high rainfall amounts in the eastern region and normal rainfall in most other districts.

Figure 2: Rainfall Estimate, August 2003 vs. Long Term Average



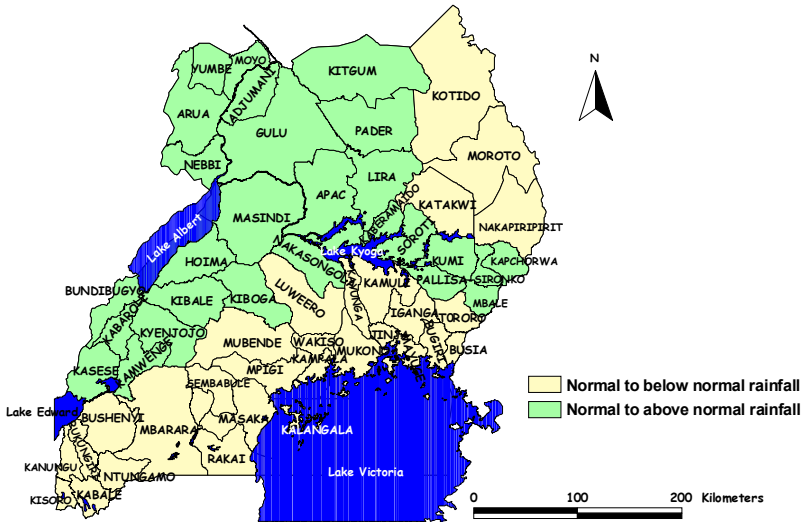
FEWS NET/Uganda, September 2003; Source of data: NOAA

In late August, weather experts from the Greater Horn of Africa held a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, to derive a probabilistic forecast for September to December 2003. Following the meeting, the Uganda Department of Meteorology issued its medium range forecast for Uganda for this period, indicating high likelihood of near normal to above normal rainfall for parts of eastern upwards to northern and northwestern Uganda through Lake Kyoga Basin. Districts in western Uganda around Lake Albert downwards to Lake Edward, along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, are also expected to receive normal to above normal rainfall. The rest of the country is projected to have normal to below normal rainfall (Figure 3). If these rains occur as predicted, the most negative impact on crop cultivation and livestock farming is expected to be in southwestern Uganda districts, close to Rwanda and Tanzania, where this is the major season and where low rainfall could result in reduced production, impacting on households' food access and security. Below normal rains in Karamoja (Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit Districts) will have limited impact as households in the region will have harvested most of their crops and will be preparing for the normal dry period in October. August to November/December is a minor season in central and eastern Uganda and Lake Victoria Basin. Hence the probability of below normal rainfall in these regions may only impact households, whose harvests in the first and main cropping season were low, mainly in areas facing civil insecurity.

2.2 Crop Production and Conditions:

Despite earlier concerns of district agriculture and extension personnel, a delayed first season crop harvest, due to late planting in several districts, has not significantly impeded second season land preparation and cultivation. Agricultural officials in central and eastern Lake Victoria Basin and northwestern and parts of western Uganda report that farmers are busy cultivating second season crops. In

Figure 3: Weather Forecast, Sep. to Dec. 2003



NB: Forecast does not necessarily follow administrative/political boundaries; they are only used to ease representation

FEWS NET/Uganda, September 2003; Source of Information: Department of Meteorology

several districts the farmers are concurrently harvesting first season crops, including maize and millet, while sowing for the second season. Favorable rainfall has been received since early August, providing sufficient conditions for normal crop germination and sprouting. However, high moisture levels continue to affect cereals (maize, millet and some sorghum), approximately half of which are still in the fields, limiting drying and thereby leading to harvests of high moisture content crops. Normal crop harvests have reportedly been realized in most of the country. The Investment in Developing Export Agriculture (IDEA) Project, a USAID funded activity promoting the production and export of non-traditional export crops, estimates that between 250,000 to 300,000 MT of maize will be produced in the first season (not including the Kapchorwa crop). Approximately 80,000 to 100,000 MT of beans were produced in the last season.

The long growing cycle maize crop (April to October) in Kapchorwa District, a key maize growing area, is still in the field and the harvest is not expected to begin until mid to late October. About 40,000 to 50,000 MT of maize is expected from the district, at least 20 percent higher than normal due to a combination of producer incentives at the beginning of the season that encouraged farmers to open and cultivate larger acreage as well as favorable weather conditions that supported the crop. Meanwhile, farmers in the district are busy cultivating mainly pulses, tubers and root crops. Agro-pastoralists in Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit Districts have begun harvesting sorghum; however, the bulk of the crop will be harvested in October.

Civil insecurity in the North (Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and parts of Lira Districts) and East (Kaberamaido, Katakwi and Soroti) continues to limit IDP and other households' access to land to cultivate this season, as was the case in the most recent season. Only a few people are reportedly able to access fields to harvest the last season's crops. Low cultivation in the second season will lead to low harvests and increased food insecurity.

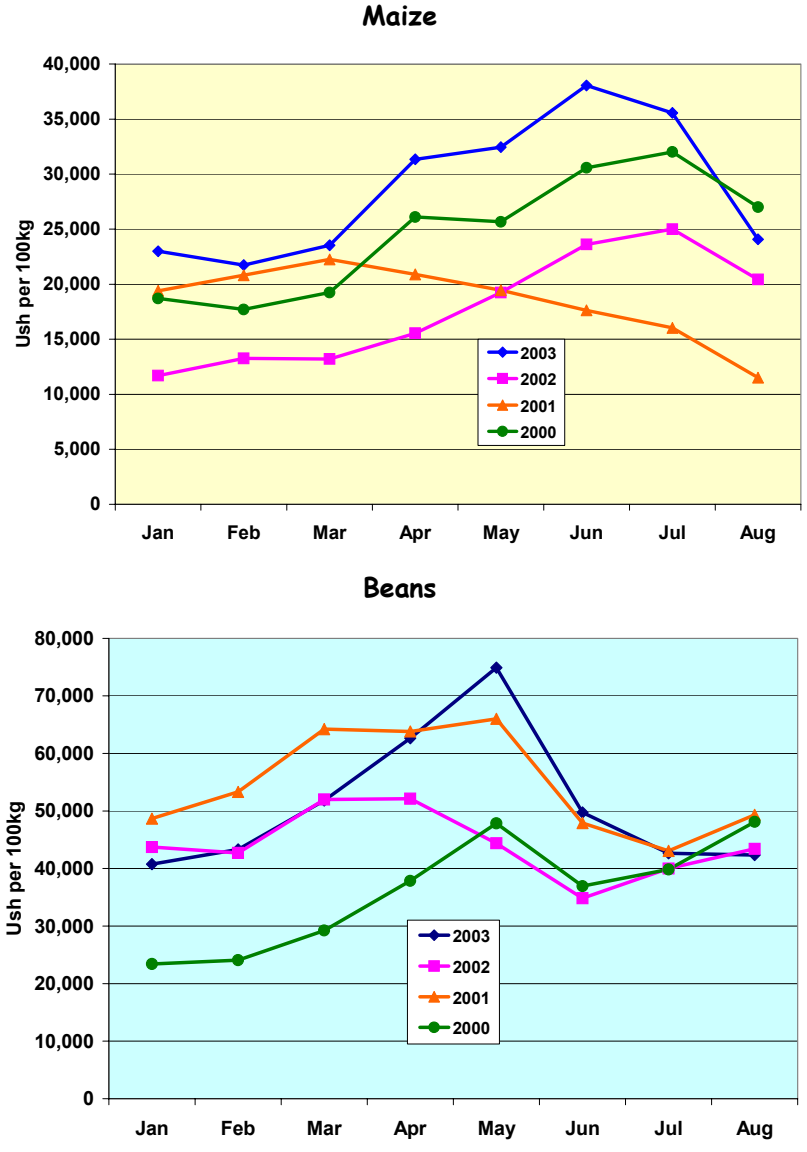
3.0 Market Trends, Commodity Prices, Trade and Food Availability and Access

Record level maize prices observed in regional markets over the last seven months finally declined in August as the harvest intensified. However, they generally remain higher than the average for the last two years. Although the recent price decline has slightly improved market access for dependent households, mainly in urban locations, their purchasing power remains lower than in previous years. Higher than normal maize prices at the beginning of the first season of 2003 provided incentives for farming households to devote large land acreage to the crop. High regional and in-country demand for local consumption and to meet humanitarian requirements continues to keep the price of maize high, enabling trade in the commodity despite quality limitations attributed mainly to high moisture content. Market Information Services reports a significant flow of maize since July 2003, into Kenya, where demand is high.

Overall, 2003 wholesale maize price trends across markets in the country, although higher overall, are quite similar to 2000 price trends. In Kampala, for example, maize prices since the beginning of 2003 have mimicked 2000 prices and only reached below the 2000 level in August. Between June and August 2003, wholesale maize prices declined 39 percent but still remain higher than almost any other time during the last two years; the largest drop, 32 percent, was observed between July and August (see Figure 4).

Looking back on the 2000 season, FEWS NET Uganda draws two possible scenarios for the 2003 season. In the first scenario, if the current demand for maize holds, all other conditions being normal, maize prices on the wholesale market will remain at a minimum UShs 180 (US $0.09)/kg until after April 2004. This price will benefit farming households' access to cash income this year, as it did in 2000. The high prices will again encourage farming households to grow more maize in the first season of 2004, which could then lead to a glut with prices plummeting after the first season's harvest next year. The alternative scenario involves reduced demand in Kenya when their crop is harvested in October and November, leaving Ugandan markets as the only source of demand. Local demand, however, could decline due to several factors, including reduced purchasing to meet WFP and other relief requirements. This will likely lead to a decline in maize prices, probably down to UShs 150/kg between November 2003 and February 2004. This would be more beneficial over the long term, providing enough incentive for farmers to cultivate next year but with less likely over supply in July 2004 therefore much less price drop.

Figure 4: Wholesale Prices in Kampala, Jan. to Aug. '00 to '03



FEWS NET Uganda, 9/03 *Source of data: Market Information Services*

Improved and increased access to regional markets helps to promote trade, providing markets for Uganda's maize. However, high prices, partly induced by the cost of drying the maize to acceptable moisture levels, make it less competitive in the regional markets than other producers' maize.

Poor quality is also detrimental. To ensure that Uganda's crop remains competitive, it is imperative that cost of production is reduced and quality be improved

Current wholesale bean prices in Kampala are comparable to previous years, indicating good and minimal change in affordability for market dependant households. Market prices for other commodities remain relatively stable and comparable to past years, supporting normal access to markets and food security for most households.