



Contributions received with acknowledgement from District Officials, Action Against Hunger -USA and other non-government organizations, commercial traders, Uganda's Department of Meteorology and Market Information Service.

Summary

- Household food security is normal throughout the country, except for civil insecure districts.
- Large consumptions of food during traditional ceremonies and sales of cereals in Karamoja become worrisome as food stocks are depleted.
- A World Food Programme (WFP) led assessment of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts confirms that IDPs were able to cultivate crops during 2003. However, many barely meet the recommended daily kilocalorie allowance (RDA). WFP will provide between 50 to 65 percent of the RDA between October 2003 and April 2004.
- Improvement of civil security in eastern Uganda will enable households there to resume normal crop production and increase food supply to Gulu, reducing prices of staples.

1.0 Food Security Conditions and Prospects

Ongoing crop harvests continue to support normal food availability, access and food security in most districts of Uganda. Overall, good harvests from the second season augur well for the next six months.

In Karamoja Region, normal crop harvests from the 2003 single season have enabled households to replenish food stocks. In the agricultural and agro-pastoral zones, a majority of households harvested adequate cereals and have surplus food to exchange and sell within and outside the region. Improved crop supplies and

inflows to markets have led to large reductions in market prices, improving access for market-dependent households. For example, sorghum, a staple crop in the region, now sells for an average of US\$14,000 (about US\$6.50) per 100 kilogram bag, compared to US\$50,000 (about US\$25) at the same time last year. Livestock/grain terms of trade continue to improve, as fewer people now need to sell livestock given the abundance of their own cereals.

As previously reported, good harvests in Karamoja this year have prompted households and communities to carry out traditional rites previously postponed. These ceremonies involve the consumption of large amounts of food, depleting what would otherwise be stocks for later in the year. At the same time, many households are selling some of their harvest now to obtain cash for various non-food essentials. It is important to factor these two activities in when considering just how long the current harvest might last households. Households and communities should be encouraged and trained to manage their food stores through construction of individual and/or communal stores where surplus food can be safely kept, with minimal damage, for use later during lean times. Grain banks, where households can sell surplus grain during a good harvest when prices are low but access food at cheaper prices during scarcity are some of the ways non government organizations can assist the communities in this region. The Karamoja Agro-pastoral Development Program (formerly Lutheran World Federation) has positive experience in this practice.

Increasing dry conditions in the Karamoja Region have reduced the availability of vegetation and water, limiting livestock's access to pastures and water. Normal seasonal migration is reported, as pastoralists move their livestock in search of pastures and water to dry season grazing areas within the region and towards neighboring Kapchorwa, Katakwi, Kitgum, Kumi, Lira and Sironko Districts. However, civil insecurity attributed to Karimojong warriors limits free access to neighboring districts to graze, as the residents there are wary of their activities. Inability to access pastures and water in neighboring districts will affect Karimojong livestock during the coming periods of extended dryness.

While normal seasonal livestock migrations away from homesteads have reduced access to milk for household members who remain behind, alternate food supplies enable them obtain adequate nutritional nourishment. Increased movement of livestock in search of pastures and water exposes them to raids, which are reportedly sporadic but increasing.

Civil security remains uncertain in Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Lira Districts of northern Uganda with no significant change. Nearly one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain in settlements and suffer varying levels of food insecurity. Many are unable to meet the daily recommended 2100 kilocalorie per person.

In September and October 2003, the World Food Programme (WFP) led a joint Emergency Food Needs Assessment (EFNA) of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts. The assessment findings confirmed that despite the insecurity, many IDPs in camps across the three districts were able to utilize periods of relative calm to access land and cultivate crops, supplementing food aid to meet their annual food needs. The length of relative calm is the main determinant of how much access to own food sources they manage

to obtain. In addition, a number of income opportunities enable some of the IDPs to earn cash that can be used to access both food and non-food essentials. Of the settlements assessed, old IDP camps, established before 2000, mainly in Kitgum District, were found to be most food insecure with many barely able to meet more than 30 percent of their own food needs. This may be a factor of increased dependency after prolonged periods of stay in the settlements. Camps in Gulu District, which has the highest number of IDPs, and where the impact of civil insecurity is most apparent, were also highly food insecure. Here, an average IDP household barely covers 35 percent of its own food requirements. IDPs in new settlements, formed after June 2003 in Kitgum District, and those located in Pader District, are able to meet between 50 and 60 percent of their food needs.

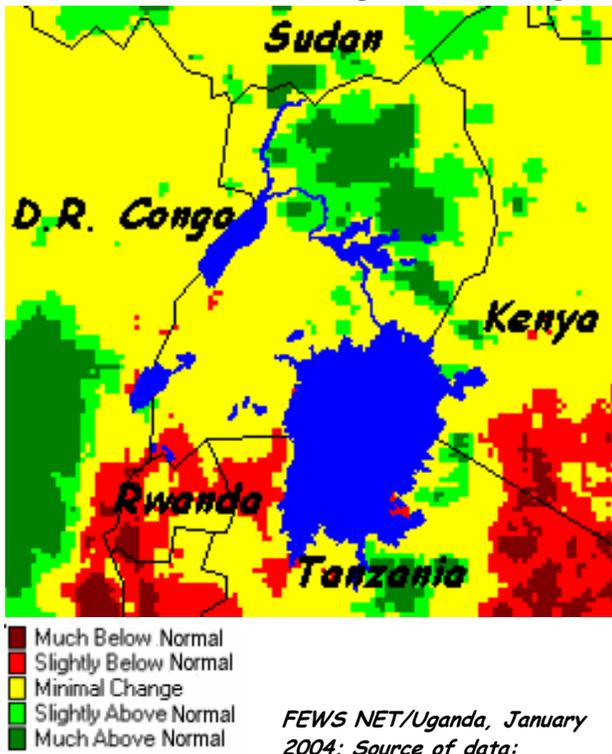
Based on these findings, WFP reviewed its food program for the six months starting October 2003 through April 2004 according to assessed need. IDPs in Gulu District will receive 65 percent of the RDA while those in Kitgum will get between 50 and 70 percent, the latter for older settlements. Pader District IDPs will receive 50 percent of the RDA. Another review of food assistance to IDPs will be carried out no later than April 2004.

2.0 National Trends:

2.1 Agro-climatic Conditions: Overall, December saw normal dry conditions in a majority of Uganda's bimodal districts, with mixed rainfall conditions in other areas. The dry weather signaled the end of the second rainy season and provided good conditions for harvesting, the main agricultural activity currently taking place. Only northern and parts of eastern Uganda recorded above normal rainfall during the month, corroborated by

remotely sensed satellite imagery (refer to Figure 1).

Figure 1: Rainfall Estimates, December 2003 Vs Long Term Average



2.2 Crop Production and Conditions: In general, plentiful and well-distributed rainfall during the second rainy season in Uganda enabled farmers to realize normal harvests for cereals, pulses, root crops and tubers, based on recent qualitative estimates. The exceptions to this were in districts affected by civil insecurity and where access to land remains limited.

Currently, farmers are busy harvesting and drying their crops with minimal cultivation taking place as they await the next rains due in February to March. Increased availability and supply of key staple crops, including beans, Irish

potatoes, matooke, millet, sorghum as well as drought-resistant tubers, such as cassava and sweet potatoes, continues to improve the household food security situation.

3.0 Commodity Prices, Food Availability and Access

Overall, while national price fluctuations followed normal seasonal trends this year, the year ended with comparatively higher 2003 retail prices than the average for the past two years.

In Gulu District (Figure 2), an area affected by civil insecurity, 2003 retail prices for finger millet - an important staple food -- were above the 2001/2002 average price during most of the year except in February. Because access to arable land is limited access, harvests have been lower than normal in past years, and therefore outside areas (mainly Kaberamaido, Lira, and Kaberamaido, Katakwi, Kumi and Soroti Districts in eastern Uganda) supply the markets in Gulu District. Expansion of conflict to the east between June and November 2003 lowered millet production in those districts, partly explaining the increased millet prices in Gulu District, which were between 12 and 31 percent higher than the average of the previous 2 years. These higher prices place an increased burden on displaced households whose wage earning opportunities are already limited.

Improvement of security in the east (Teso sub-region) will enable households there to resume normal crop production and increase food supply to Gulu, and this is likely to reduce staple prices.

Figure 2: Millet Retail Prices in Gulu Market, January to December 2003 Vs Average 2001/02



FEWS NET Uganda, January 2004; Source: Market Information Services