



Summary

The humanitarian situation in northern Uganda, where around 70% of the population is displaced, is still worrisome. Relative peace in the eastern region is enabling IDPs to begin returning home. Despite a three-week delay, the first season is now fully established, and crops are doing well. Markets in Lira and Soroti are functioning normally, despite the civil insecurity. Sorghum prices remain stable; prices for millet, a major staple crop, are expected to rise to pre-harvest levels in the next four months.

1.0 Northern Uganda: Gulu, Kitgum, Lira and Pader Districts

Persistent civil insecurity in the northern Uganda has displaced more than 1.2 million people, equivalent to around 70% of the total population in the four districts. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has continued to maim, abduct and kill residents, and the fear of such atrocities has confined Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to the camps. Access to adequate water, sanitation and health services remains a big challenge for the IDPs.

One of the main effects of the IDPs' restricted movement is to limit their access to adequate land to cultivate crops; the onset of the first season rains, therefore, presents an opportunity that most IDPs in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, where access to land is limited to a 3 km radius around the camps, will not be able to take advantage of. Consequently, households seek alternative ways to supplement their own meager production, engaging in available income opportunities, such as burning and selling charcoal to enable them purchase food from markets. Some households have also adjusted their food consumption patterns by having only one main meal a day. Even so, IDPs are able to meet no more than 15 -20 percent of their food needs on their own and depend on food aid to fill the gap. Preliminary results of a World Food Programme (WFP)-led emergency food security assessment in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts indicate that the agency needs to

increase food aid deliveries between April and December 2004.

Following the Barlonyo massacre of February 2004, the number of IDPs in outlying rural camps in Lira District has increased tremendously. A rapid inter-agency humanitarian assessment was undertaken in March to determine the conditions and requirements of the IDPs. The mission found that displaced persons closer to Lira Municipality were worse off than those living in camps farther away because households in rural camps had significantly more access to cultivable land and were able to meet up to 80 percent of their daily food requirements from their own stocks or gardens. Those in or close to the municipality, on the other hand, could only meet around 50 percent of their food needs with their own production and the limited cash they could generate to buy food from the market. The food gap for both categories is met by food aid supplied by the World Food Programme (WFP).

As part of the same inter-agency assessment, a rapid nutritional assessment was carried out, measuring 1,168 children under 5 years of age in various camps in Lira District (using middle upper arm circumference or MUAC). The results showed an average Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate of 8 percent, with malnutrition levels higher in camps closer to Lira Municipality. Although this does not indicate an emergency yet, WFP plans to begin providing general food assistance to the IDPs to meet their food gap given that 16% of the children were considered at risk of malnutrition.

An additional 125,000 MT of food aid is required from April to December to meet the needs of the new IDPs. If WFP does not receive additional resources (both cash and food pledges are needed to cover the shortfall) the agency anticipates a pipeline break by July 2004, when cereals and blended foods will run out.

1.1 Eastern Uganda: Kaberamaido, Katakwi, Kumi and Soroti Districts

A relative lull in rebel activity in eastern Uganda since the end of 2003 has encouraged some IDPs to begin returning to their homes. All IDPs in Kumi District, many of them from neighboring Kaberamaido, Katakwi and Soroti Districts, have returned home. However, IDPs from areas in Kaberamaido and Katakwi Districts, close to Lira District, are reluctant to return because of the uncertain civil security.

The slow but steady return of IDPs has prompted the Government of Uganda and humanitarian organizations to identify ways to assist their resettlement. Following the findings of the March assessment, WFP will continue providing general food assistance at 50 percent of food needs for an estimated 360,000 IDPs, who are predicted to remain in the camps for the next four months, after which they are expected to return to their homes. At that point, they will qualify for a 2-month full ration as a resettlement package. The government and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) will provide agricultural seeds and tools for the second season planting in August. The above humanitarian response is premised on the assumption that the current favorable civil security conditions will continue.

2.0 National Trends:

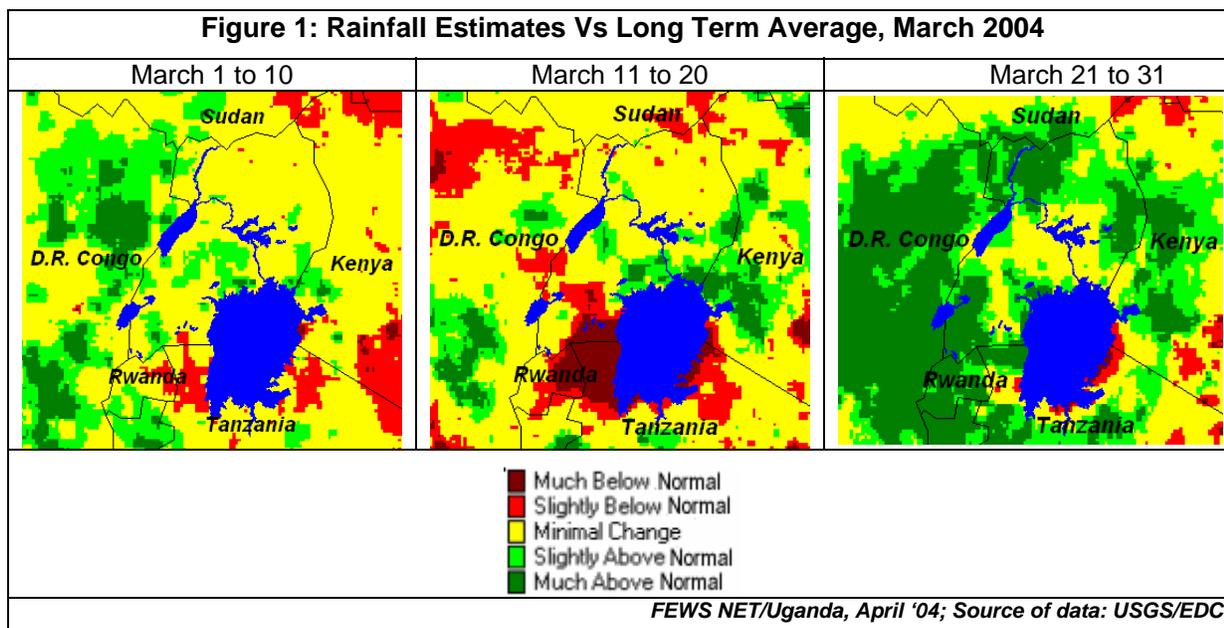
2.1 Agro-climatic Conditions: Relatively dry conditions persisted through the first weeks of

March, marking a slow onset to the first rainy season in several parts of the country. Rains finally fell late in the month, and the season fully established in most parts of the country by the second week of April. This season's pattern has so far mirrored the first season of 2003, when the rains also started late; the late start last year was subsequently offset by an extension of rains into July and August. At this point, it is too early to comment on the quality of this year's first season.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of March rainfall, comparing each dekad in March with the long-term average. The images confirm much below normal rains in southern and parts of southwestern Uganda during mid-March, giving way to wetter than normal conditions in most parts of the country by the last week of March.

2.2 Crop Production and Conditions:

Despite relatively dry conditions at the beginning of March, farmers began sowing various cereals, legumes and root crops in anticipation of the rains, which started later in the month. A major portion of early-planted maize in western Uganda is about one foot tall, although some of the crop has reached knee high. Most maize in central and eastern Uganda has just germinated. The April rains have helped, and crops are doing well in most parts of the country with no reports of significant constraints on crop production (where crops were planted).



As previously mentioned, eastern and northern regions remain areas of major concern. Limited access to land in the north is a key impediment to crop production and continues to make the displaced population reliant on food aid for a large portion of their dietary requirements. Although security has nearly normalized in most parts of eastern Uganda, it will take at least one full season before families are back on their feet again. The challenge of clearing new land and obtaining access to planting materials will place significant constraints on production this season in these areas.

Pastures in the “cattle corridor”, which stretches diagonally from southwestern to northeastern Uganda, have recovered from the dry season and are adequate for livestock. Water for livestock is also readily available. In Karamoja, cattle are slowly moving back closer to kraals following the onset of the rains there. However, many livestock still remain in dry season grazing areas in the wet agriculture belt to the west of the region, where pasture and water are still adequate.

3.0 Commodity Prices, Trade and Food Availability and Access

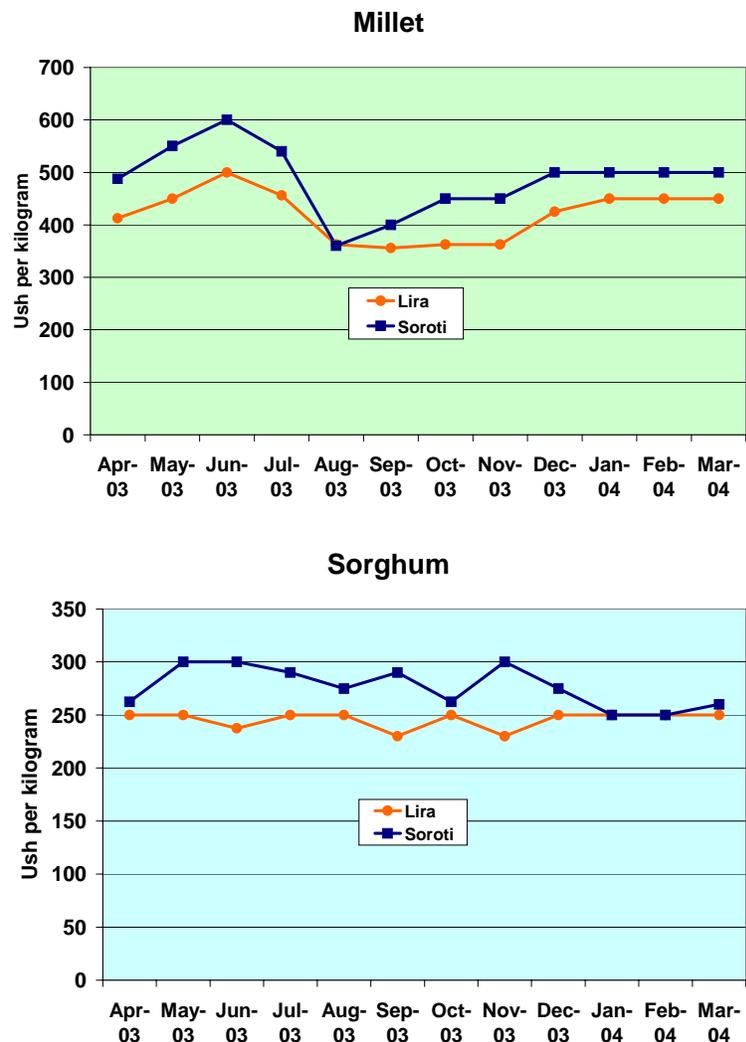
Retail staple food prices in selected markets in northern (Lira) and eastern Uganda (Soroti) are stable, suggesting that markets are functioning normally despite the civil insecurity. However, prices in Soroti have been relatively higher than in Lira (Figure 2). Millet prices in both markets followed normal seasonal trends, showing a significant reduction in July 2003, when the harvest began. However, millet prices in Soroti rose immediately in August, as traders anticipated a shortage due to losses, which resulted from insecurity at harvest time, which limited the population’s access to their fields. Millet

prices are expected to increase in the coming months to pre- 2003 harvest levels of UShs 500 (US\$0.26) and UShs 600 (US\$0.31) per kilogram in Lira and Soroti respectively, as household food stocks dwindle and households increasingly purchase food from the market.

Sorghum prices in Lira have remained stable in the last 12 months, averaging Ush 250 (US\$ 0.13) per kilogram. In Soroti prices were approximately 20% higher than in Lira until recently.

Millet prices are more responsive to seasonal variations of supply and demand than sorghum. This is because millet has uses in addition to food, including as an income earning option for women who make alcohol out of millet.

Figure 2: Average Commodity Retail Prices in Lira and Soroti Districts, April 2003 to March 2004



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Source: Market Information Service