

CENTRAL ASIA Food Security Outlook Update

January 2012

Recent snowfall and below-normal temperatures in higher elevations alleviated concerns of short-term dryness in Afghanistan

Key Messages

- Early seasonal rainfall in October and November created good winter wheat sowing conditions. However, dry conditions prevailed over the central Afghanistan from mid-December to mid-January, increasing worries of a second underperforming wet season. Nonetheless, heavy precipitation that was received in late January filled deficits.
- Wheat flour prices in most of Afghanistan have been stable throughout the winter months and remain near the five-year average.
- Record high remittances received in Tajikistan will mitigate the effects of a slightly below-normal harvest and elevated food and diesel prices.

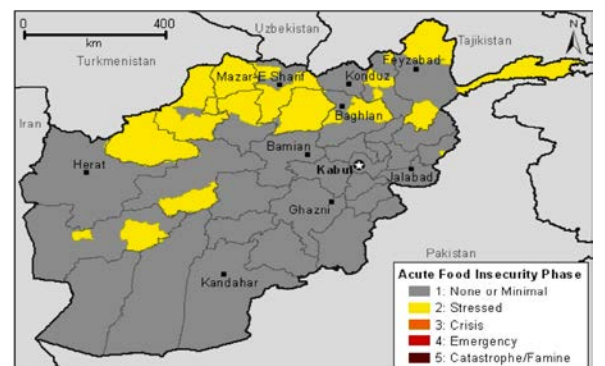
Regional Overview of Current Food Security Conditions

There have been no major deviations from the assumptions developed in the October Afghanistan Outlook report. Afghanistan and Tajikistan entered the lean season in the fall of 2011. This is a time when the vast majority of rural households typically rely on food stocks from the previous season's harvest or food stocks purchased from the market using income earned earlier in the year. Because of the seasonally low temperatures and snow accumulation there are limited opportunities for households to engage in employment or other livelihood activities. Winter wheat is normally sown in the fall months and remains dormant until the spring of the following year. The most important variables to monitor this time of year include food prices and climatological progress – most notably snow accumulation. The lean season normally lasts until April when the snow melt and spring rains allow households to begin to engage in cultivation and labor opportunities emerge.

Following a poor 2011 wheat harvest and limited labor opportunities that were brought on by untimely and inadequate rainfall, poor households' food security was expected to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in **northwestern Afghanistan** (Samangan, Balkh, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Faryab and Badghis provinces) during the lean season. However, with assistance provided by the Afghan government, United Nations, and NGOs, household food security in this area remain Stressed (IPC phase 2). In addition to deteriorating food security conditions in northwestern Afghanistan, water inaccessibility was a

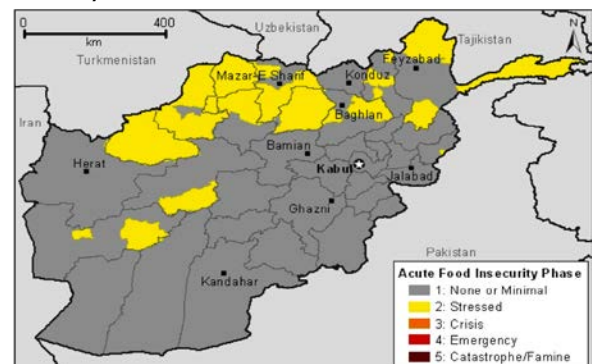
This report provides an update to the October 2011 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook for Afghanistan which estimated food security conditions from October 2011 to March 2012.

Figure 1. Current estimated food security outcomes, January 2012



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Estimated food security outcomes, February to March 2012



Source: FEWS NET

For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

critical issue in the late summer and fall months of 2011. These concerns have diminished since the fall rains began and water availability increased.

Northeastern Afghanistan (Baghlan, Kunduz, and Takhar provinces) food security outcomes remained Stressed (IPC phase 2) after the loss of rainfed harvest this summer. Despite the poor harvest, these areas are better-off compared northwest Afghanistan due to the good melon harvest and additional agricultural labor that is afforded the area because of more irrigated crops. The German government also spent 250 million Euro in 2011 on development activities in this region, which provided additional labor opportunities that is expected to improved food access for households in the region throughout the lean season.

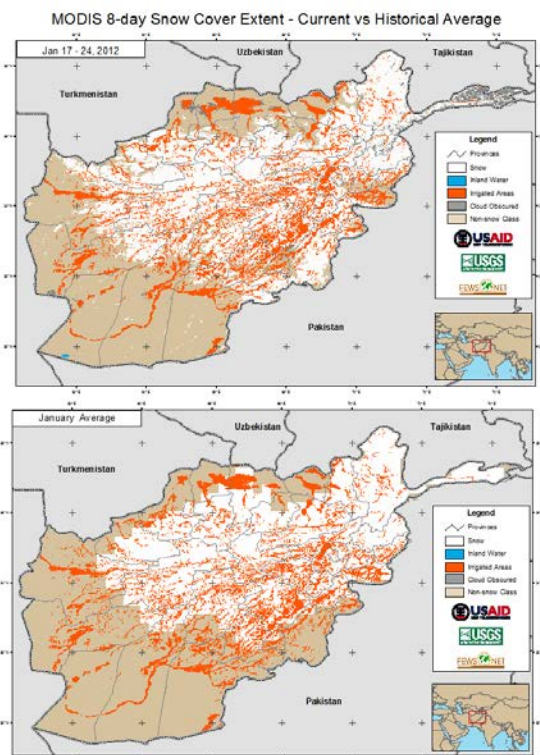
Rainfed zones of **central highlands** (Day Kundi, Bamyan, and Ghor), **northeast** (Badakhshan), and **western Afghanistan** (Hirat) are also affected by the poor rainy season. However, the impacts on household food security are limited as the primary source of food is from the market rather than food harvest from the small plots available in the area. Income from remittances and labor opportunities were reported to be normal this year. While wheat flour prices unexpectedly rose in June, they have remained near the five-year average since September. This is likely due to a good supply of wheat flour in the region.

The heavy snowfall in January created avalanches that left remote districts and villages in the Badakhshan and the central highlands isolated. If these conditions prolong they have been known to result in food shortages and elevate local market prices. However, this is a normal seasonal hazard, and households typically stock food prior the arrival of winter to mitigate the risk food shortages. Households are expected to be well prepared this year as income levels were near normal and external assistances of the government, NGOs, and WFP was delivered earlier in the year.

The Afghan government has assisted 139,400 affected households in the central highlands, northeast, and northwestern Afghanistan with food aid and livelihoods assistance packages. In addition, 48,155 households are currently being assisted by NGOs using cash based interventions in the northern Afghanistan. FAO is planning to assist 47,500 households with wheat seed and de-worming packages. ICRC assisted 25,000 households whose harvest failed to grow and have been exposed to conflicts in northern Afghanistan. The remaining gap will be met by WFP food aid distribution that received funds from USAID and other donors. Since June 2011 USAID has provided more than 80 million dollars in order to respond to food security conditions in Afghanistan. The above assistance is expected to cover food consumption for affected households for the next four to six 6 months when the next harvest is expected to occur.

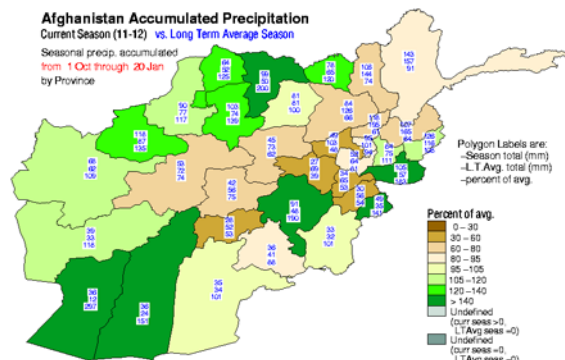
Recent government reports from **southern Afghanistan** indicate that approximately 35,000 households have been displaced by recent conflict in Kandahar province. Details on the situation are limited at this time.

Figure 3. Snow Cover Extent, January, 17 -24, 2012 and January Average



Source: USGS

Figure 4. Accumulated Precipitation Compared Long-term Average



Source: USGS

In 2011, Tajikistan experienced a decrease in wheat harvests that was approximately 10 percent below the four year average. In addition, nominal wheat and diesel prices remained at near record high levels. While food access for poor households is threatened under these circumstances, households are generally expected to be able to meet their consumption needs as remittances, which is a major source of income for households in Tajikistan, responded with record high levels. It is estimated that 2011 remittances will reach 2.69 billion USD, 146 million USD more than in 2008 – the year with the next highest gross remittances received. Tajikistan receives remittances from migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan. Inflows follow a seasonal pattern that peaks in the summer months and troughs in winter months. In 2008 and 2011, when food and fuel prices have risen to anomalously high levels, remittances inflows increased in responds.

Markets and Trade

December 2011 wheat flour market prices in Afghanistan were slightly below the five-year average in most reference markets. While wheat flour prices in Tajikistan are near last year's prices, which were above normal levels, they have begun to show some downward pressure since the fall months. Good wheat flour supplies from Pakistan and Kazakhstan due to the good 2011 wheat harvest and relatively good trade flows have kept prices stable over the fall and winter months.

A bridge connecting a railroad that serves southern Tajikistan is no longer operational. It is unclear when the bridge will be repaired. There are reports of food supplies waiting to cross the bridge. All other rail connections into Tajikistan are operational. While this might cause some trade flow disruptions to southern Tajikistan, the roads connecting southern Tajikistan with Dushanbe are operational and are expected to continue to serve as reliable trade route. However, with higher than normal diesel prices, commodity prices may increase until the bridge becomes operational again.

Seasonal Climatological Progress

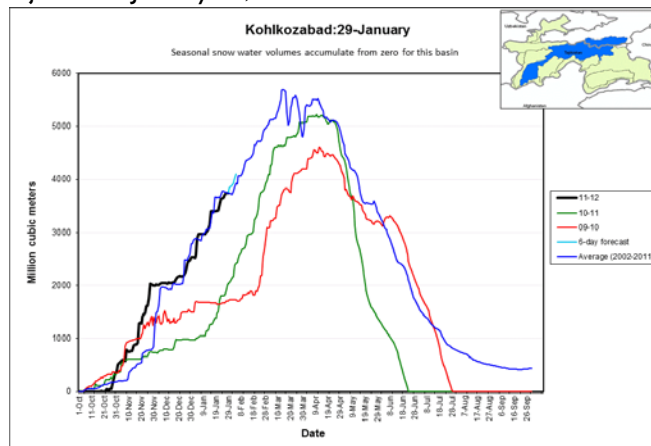
In Afghanistan, above-normal rain and snowfall in the early months of the wet season (October-November) was followed by a month of dry weather conditions, which began to raise concerns that this year will result in a second consecutive poor wet season and wheat harvest. However, recent (mid-January) snowfall eliminated these concerns to a large degree, particularly as the below-normal temperatures in the higher elevation prevented early snowmelt.

The dry spells came after a good performing early wet season, which created good conditions to allow for winter wheat plantation. Currently winter wheat is in the dormancy phase.

The estimated snow cover in Afghanistan is near normal, as shown in Figure 3. However, the cumulative seasonal precipitation is lower than the long-term average, as of January 20th. Figure 4 shows that some provinces in the central highlands and Badakkshan Afghanistan have precipitation deficits ranging from 60 to 90 percent of the long-term average while more severe deficits are in Logar, Wardak, and Parwan province that range from about 40 to 50 percent of the long-term average. Normally the peak period of snow accumulation occurs between the end of February and mid-March, giving one to two more months to close precipitation deficits and build adequate snow to meet irrigation water needs in the spring and summer.

Tajikistan has received near normal precipitation this season and temperatures have remained low enough to ensure adequate snow accumulation. Snow-water equivalent models for Tajikistan estimate higher levels than the same period last year, a poor year for snow accumulation (Figure 5).

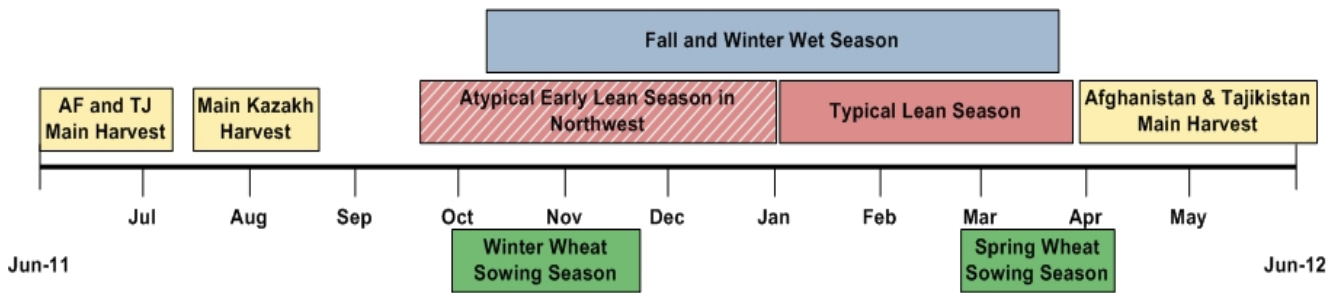
Figure 5: Snow-water Equivalent Model Kolkhozabad Basin, Tajikistan – January 29, 2012



Source: USGS

Long-term forecasts from IRI show that the remainder of the wet season has a normal to slightly below-normal probability of precipitation. Additionally, the forecasts predict warmer than normal temperatures for the remainder of the wet season. Depending on the extent of the warmer temperatures, there could be rapid snowmelt causing flooding and early depletion of irrigation water. FEWS NET will continue to monitor the seasonal progress in Central Asia.

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: FEWS NET