



Food Security Bulletin

May-June 2004

In the areas surveyed, the winter harvest of wheat has been less than last year. The data of this reporting cycle shows a hike in wheat prices and lower-than-last-year food stocks. This confirms last bulletin's prediction of lesser yield. So far, vulnerable populations do not appear to have resorted to negative or irreversible coping mechanisms on a noticeable scale, though.

On the other hand, the maize crop, which is a significant component of the diet in the hills and mountains, is due in August. Further, the monsoon has reached the Western parts of the country and the paddy season is on course. Both factors should mitigate the near to long term shocks of the poor winter harvest.

The conflict certainly continues to impede movement of people and commodities in and out of District Headquarters. Yet, so far, conclusive evidence that this leads to lower local production or consumption levels has not materialized through this survey.

All in all, given the norms for Nepal, VAM is not overtly concerned about the current state of food security in the survey Districts.

The one clear exception is Dailekh. The testing security situation, in combination with the District's difficult agricultural conditions, continues to be the cause of concern. So far, security constraints have prevented VAM from assessing food security in Dailekh. That none the less remains a priority, and VAM will conduct an assessment once circumstances permit.

Lower wheat yields. Notwithstanding the Ministry of Agriculture national estimates of a bumper wheat harvest, farmers in most surveyed Districts

continue to insist that the yield is considerably less than last year.

Higher wheat prices. In 10 out of thirty-two surveyed Districts, wheat prices are 15-33% higher than this time last year. The trend supports the assessment that yields are lower.

Less food stocks. Also, half as many households as last year estimate that food stocks after the winter harvest will last as much as 2-3 months. The number of households who think this year's winter stock will last no more than a month has risen correspondingly.

More cash income. In all Districts, the planting of paddy marks the end of the lean season and offers the rural poor who depend on wage labor gainful employment. In the Mid West, collecting the valuable herb of Yarshagumba is a profitable income source for many households during this season.

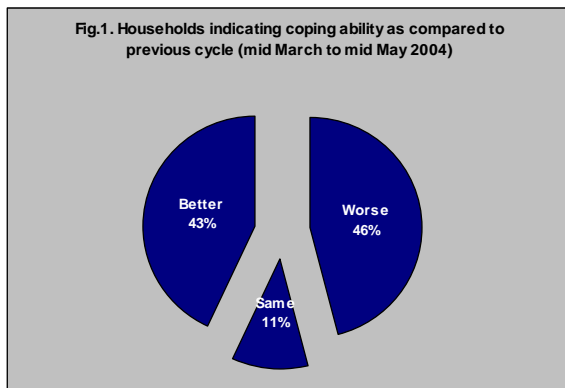
Normal out-migration. In this reporting cycle, the number of out-migrants is almost the same as this time last year.

WFP resumes RCIW. In July, WFP resumes the suspended Rural Community Infrastructure Works, Food for Work, program in Jumla, Humla, Mugu and Dolpa in accordance with the Basic Operating Guidelines. The resumption follows indications that the operational environment is again safe for the staff involved.

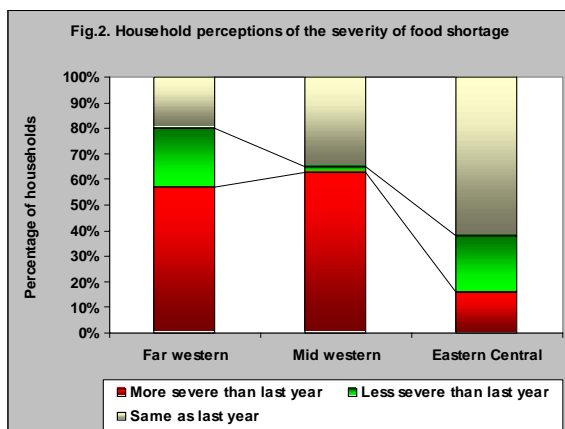
QIP on track. During this reporting cycle, 220 MT of rice is distributed in Bajhang, Bajura, Dolpa, Jumla, Kalikot and Rukum under the auspices of the Quick Impact Projects (QIP). In total, 308 projects have been approved for rollout in 9 Districts, in the order of 1,342 MT of rice for 14,000 participants.

Quantitative Highlights

Coping indices suggest that 54% of surveyed households enjoy similar or better food security than the previous reporting cycle. The remaining 46% face a worsened situation (Fig. 1). But the coping strategy index does not show the level of severity to be significant. At this point in time, people's food security depends upon the winter harvest, availability of wage labor, and flow of remittances from short-term out-migration.

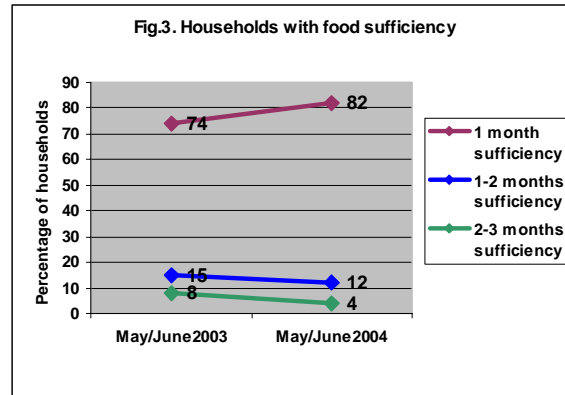


Approximately 39% of survey households claim that they face more severe food shortages than this time last year. The severity varies from region to region and coincides in most Districts with restrictions of movement. In the Far and Mid Western Regions, people fare worse: more than 55% report greater severity compared to last year. In the Central and Eastern Regions, the figure is noticeably lower at 16 percent (Fig. 2).

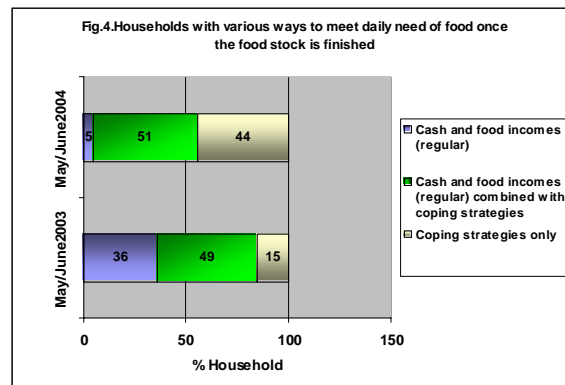


When asked about the sufficiency of their food stocks relative to the same season last year, the percentage of the sample households who claim

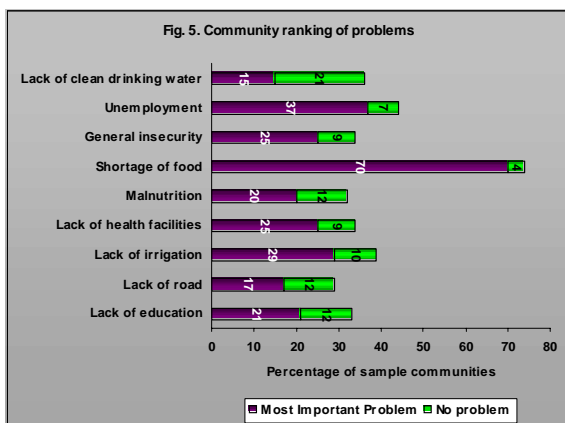
that stock will run out in a month or less is at 82, up from 74. Correspondingly, the number of households who believe that their stock is enough for 2 to 3 months is half that of this time last year (Fig. 3). Their replies of course follow in the heels of a poor wheat crop.



In the same vein, the percentage of households that believe that they are left with nothing but coping mechanisms to meet consumption requirements in the coming months is up from 15 to 44%, year-on-year. That does suggest some degree of increased vulnerability in the short to medium term (Fig. 4).



This impression is sustained by the 70% of survey communities that rank food shortage as their foremost problem. Unemployment comes in second. Also insecurity, lack of facilities for irrigation, health care, and education and lack of clean drinking water and road infrastructure are prominent on the communities' top ten of problems (Fig. 5).



Far Western Region

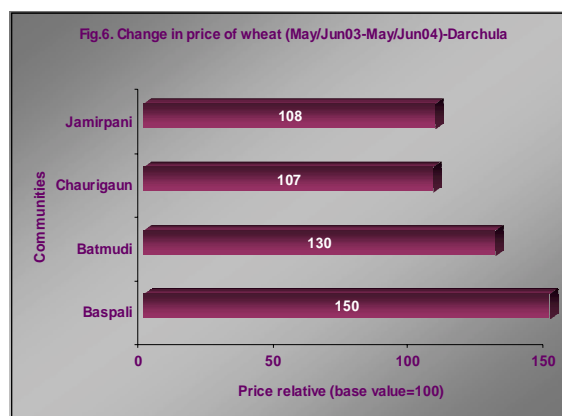
WFP Monitors cover the 7 hill and mountain Districts of Achham, Baitadi, Bajhang, Bajura, Dadeldhura, Darchula, and Doti.

Production. Local villagers claim a 25-30% reduction in winter yields over last year. In Darchula, they claim it is as high as 60 percent. Paddy transplantation has been delayed by the late beginning of the monsoon but rains have picked up from the second week of July, and Department of Meteorology data shows that the amount of rain in June is not necessarily worse than last year. In June 2003, the Department's two major rain gages in the Far West received 91 and 99 percent of the 30-year average. This year, the figures are 142 and 96 percent. The maize harvest, which constitutes a significant component of the hill and mountain food basket, is due in August and could offset some of the negative implications of the lesser winter yield if it turns out at normal levels.

Prices. In Achham, Bajhang and Bajura, the CPN(M) is reportedly fixing prices of basic food stuffs, such as vegetables and meat. For example, the price of chicken is now 40% lower in rural Bajura than in the District Headquarter. The food security implication is that small to medium scale farmers earn less when selling their produce and wage laborers and landless spend less when purchasing the same.

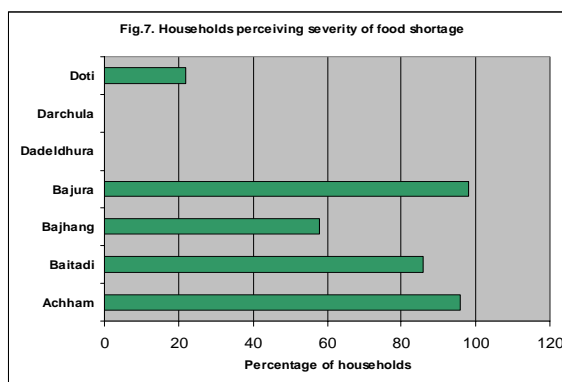
In spite of this year's lesser yield, the wheat price in the Bajura rural communities, which WFP monitors, is not higher than last year. The explanation could be that the demand is less because of this particular population's low purchasing power. How-

ever, in Baitadi, Bajhang and Darchula, wheat prices have risen, yet with significant variation across the communities of Darchula (Fig. 6).



The cause of this variation could be differences in levels of production and demand. In many of the hill and mountain vulnerable communities, wheat makes up a smaller proportion of the food basket than maize and millet do.

Stocks. Almost all surveyed households in Achham, Baitadi, Bajhang, and Bajura believe their food shortages to be more severe this year than last. In Darchula, however, in spite of the noticeably lower winter yield, they do not. Perhaps the free movement of foodstuffs or less preference for/reliance on wheat in Darchula accounts for this (Fig. 7).



Movement. Parents are reportedly sending their children to school in the District Headquarter of Darchula out of fear they might be abducted by the CPN(M). The RNA operates a pass system for villagers traveling to the District Headquarter of Bajura. The CPN(M) does the same for Darchula, and attempts to altogether prevent movement to the District Headquarter of Bajhang. If these restrictions

remain in place, they are likely to exert profound effects on the population's level of food vulnerability. In Achham, the CPN(M) prevents locally grown foods, such as vegetables, from entering the District Headquarter. In Bajhang and Bajura, the rule only applies to traders who work their way around it by having villagers carry the produce for them.

Migration. The average out-migration rate for the Far West is almost the same as last year, this reporting period. In Bajhang, Darchula, and Doti, out-migration has increased by 7-32%, year-on-year. But in other Districts within the Region, the rate is down by 6-38 percent. Migrants are almost exclusively male, and only one member of each household tends to go. When asked why, they give a combination of economic and security reasons. There is no evidence yet that the longstanding trend of returning after 5-6 months is broken.

Mid Western and Western Regions

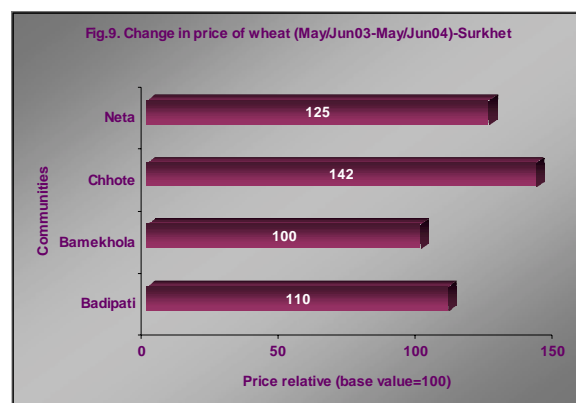
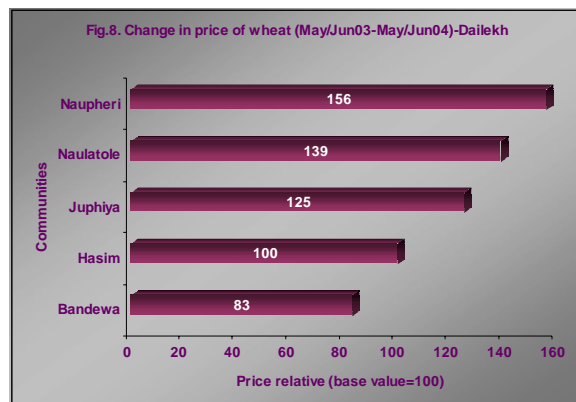
WFP Monitors cover the 12 Mid Western hill and mountain Districts of Dailekh, Dolpa, Humla, Jajarkot, Jumla, Kalikot, Mugu, Pyuthan, Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, and Surkhet in addition to the Western Terai District of Rupandehi.

Production. Local villagers in Dolpa, Rukum, Salyan, and Surkhet blame erratic rainfall for a 25-30% reduction in winter yields over last year. In Humla, Jajarkot, Mugu and Pyuthan, they estimate that the reduction is 40-50%, and in Dailekh 75 percent. The figures are subjective evaluations of individual informants and need not apply across Districts, though. Indeed, reductions may vary within Districts for a number of reasons, including discrepancies in rainfall amount and timing and difference in irrigation facilities.

For example, the Ministry of Agriculture's historical data on wheat production show that from 1997/8 to 2001/2, nine of the 13 surveyed Districts experience no more than 20% year-on-year fluctuation. Dolpa provides the exception in the one year that it sees a 30% change in production. Within this range, reductions affect small to medium scale farmers rather than wage laborers and the landless who have no production. Larger reductions would of course have an indirect effect on their livelihoods too as the farmers who employ them might be forced to reduce production in subsequent years.

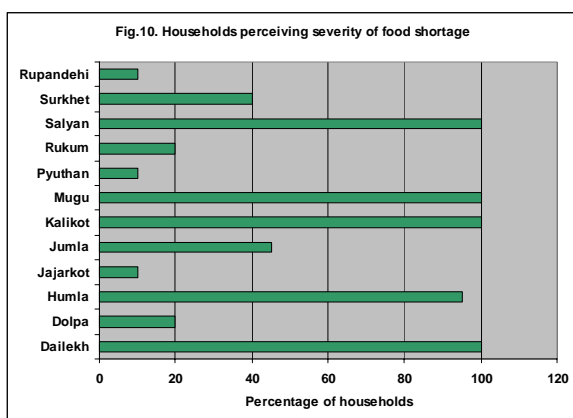
In any event, the maize harvest that constitutes a significant component of hill and mountain food baskets is due in a month. If the yield turns out to be at a normal level, it will contribute to offset negative food security implications of the lesser wheat crop.

Prices. In Humla, Jajarkot, Jumla, Rolpa, Rukum and Surkhet, the CPN(M) is reportedly fixing prices of basic food stuffs about 30-40% lower than the going rate in District Headquarter markets. Whereas this might reduce the income of small-scale farmers, it will not harm wage laborers who are paid in kind and hence buy rather than sell food at market price. The year-on-year increase of up to 20% in wheat prices in Dailekh, Jajarkot and Surkhet is probably linked to this year's lesser yield. Though, significant variation in the local rate of increase shows that levels of supply and demand vary (Fig. 8, 9). In many hill and mountain households, for example, maize and millet are more important components of the food basket than wheat is.



Stocks. Almost all surveyed households in Dailekh, Humla, Kalikot, Mugu and Salyan believe their food shortages to be more severe this year than last

(Fig. 10). That would tally with the assertion that the winter yields are reduced this year. So would our data from Mugu and northern parts of Dailekh Districts that people have increased their reliance on wild foods. It bears repeating that this is a season-specific perception of shortage. Unless the maize and/or paddy harvests disappoint, there is not cause for serious concern.



Income. CPN(M)-imposed taxes and donations are commonplace in the Mid Western and Western Regions. In Mugu, households who collect the valuable herb of Yarshagumba for vending claim to have to pay a Rs. 500 tax every month they are so engaged. Yet, given the high price (secondary reports suggest Rs. 20,000 per kg.) that the herb fetches, the tax is negligible. And that is a popular and profitable income earning activity at this time, particularly in Dolpa and Mugu. It ought to be able to offset some of the effect of the decrease in winter yields for the small to medium scale farm households there. Also in Mugu, households in CPN(M)-controlled areas report that they have to donate 12 kg. of seasonal foods (i.e., 2-3 times a year after harvesting). This barely equals 4 days of annual consumption requirements for a typical household of 5-6 members. Still, vulnerable families might find even this amount to be near or beyond their threshold of capacity.

Movement. In Pyuthan and Rukum, the reported increase in abductions of school children may lead to an increased workload of other household members – if and when children are taken or preemptively sent away – and household income may decrease. In Humla, Jajarkot, Mugu and Pyuthan, the CPN(M) is reported to prevent villagers from traveling to District Headquarters. In Dolpa, Salyan, and Surkhet, traders are required by the District Ad-

ministration Office to adhere to a Government quota system for the movement of foodstuffs outside District Headquarters. In Pyuthan, the RNA is reported to have completely blocked movement of food commodities out of District Headquarters. There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the restrictions coincide with decreased food availability in these areas, yet hard-and-fast data to this effect have yet to materialize.

Migration. Compared to the same time last year, the average out-migration rate for these Regions is up 13 percent. In Dailekh, the increase is 19% and in Surkhet 32 percent. However, the sample communities for migration data are small and the absolute numbers involved are negligible. They provide a sense of the change but not a full account of its scale.

Central and Eastern Regions

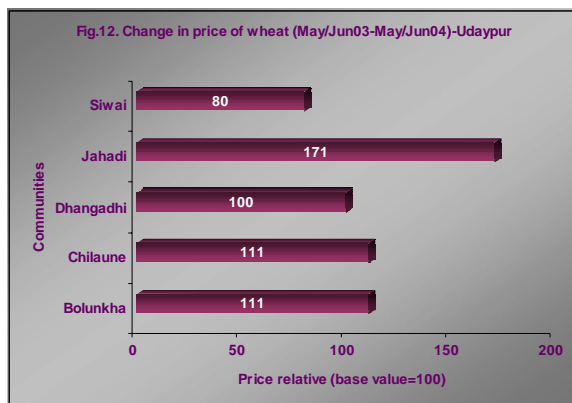
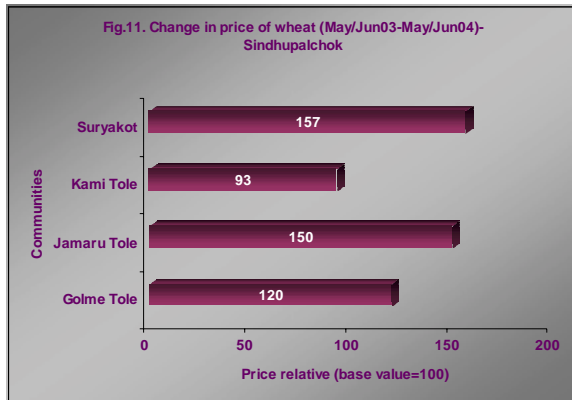
WFP Monitors cover the 12 mountain, hill and Terai Districts of Dhanusha, Dolakha, Kavre, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Parsa, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Saptari, Sindhupalchok, Siraha, and Udaypur

Production. Compared to the Far Western, Mid Western and Western Regions, food availability in the Central and Eastern Regions is far better. Still, the supposedly 90% reduction in this year's mango yield will affect households in Saptari and Siraha where fruit sales is a significant source of income adversely. The lower winter yields in several of the Districts have not reduced food security noticeably, though; perhaps the reason is the more ready availability of income earning opportunities in these regions.

Prices. CPN(M) does not fix the prices of basic food stuffs in these regions. However, in parts of Udaypur, they are reported to fix the price of livestock at a lower rate than the going District Headquarter market price. Given the fact that livestock sale is a common coping strategy, this would certainly make matters worse for households already in distress. The CPN(M) taxes traders, truckers, and bus owners and this is said to be the cause of the recent hike in the price of chemical fertilizer in parts of Kavre. In turn, the rise in cost might curb the use of fertilizer and, by implication, future production levels.

In Dhanusha, Dolakha, Kavre, Nuwakot, Saptari,

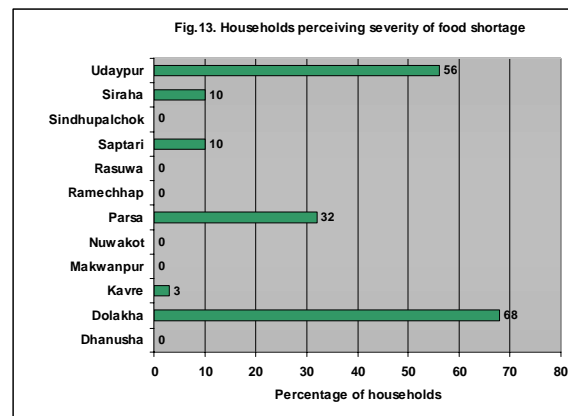
Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok, and Udaypur, the average price of wheat is up 6-32%, year-on-year. The lower yield probably explains the increase. Particularly in Sindhupalchok and Udaypur, the actual increase varies considerably from community to community (Fig. 11, 12).



It is likely that different local levels of demand and supply across the Districts account for that: for many hill and mountain households, wheat is not a significant component of the food basket; maize and millet are.

Stocks. The better food availability in this region is also reflected in household responses to the question of food shortage: most indicate that they face less severity this year than last. The exception is Dolakha and Udaypur where the majority of households believe the reverse to be true (Fig. 13). The explanation might be a combination of lower winter yield and deteriorated security in these Districts. Indeed, they are greatly affected by CPN(M) activity and have seen more disruption of movement than other Districts in these regions. A case in point is parts of Udaypur where traders need permission to

move food commodities, and mule carriers are taxed up to Rs. 1000 per mule to enable them to do so.



Migration. The average out-migration rate for this cycle in Central and Eastern Regions is equal to or slightly more than last year. Only in the 5 Districts of Dhanusha, Makwanpur, Parsa, Saptari and Siraha is the rate higher, by 24-58 percent. Makwanpur migrants are likely to have been motivated by the monsoon flooding of their communities. In the other 4 Districts, the increase in out-migration could be related to the downturn in the construction industry that otherwise attracts labor migrants in these Districts.

As part of the contractual agreement with HMG/N, WFP surveys the food security situation in all the Districts where it operates and, for purposes of comparison, some where it does not. The objective is to monitor the progress of WFP food aid interventions and detect needs as they emerge.

Thirty Monitors collect household and community data in 32 Districts and at 3 border points with India. Every 2 months, they visit in excess of 1,200 households to inquire about changes in demographics, assets, diet, livelihood. One monitor interviews migrants as they cross the border.

About 75% of visits are repeat interviews; 70% of households have participated in the survey since its October 2002 inception. The rest are selected randomly, and interviewed only once. The survey thus monitors the food security of about 7,500 people over a period of several years.

Monitors fill the same quantitative questionnaire for each community and household visit. They keep a separate qualitative account of anecdotes, impressions, events. Both records inform this bulletin – in no preset order of priority.