



2009 winter drought pushes 2 million towards hunger

HIGHLIGHTS

- Estimated winter crop losses are between 30 percent to 70 percent.
- Rising prices and crop failure have resulted in a significant increase in household food insecurity.
- 30 percent of rural households throughout the country are selling assets to cover food shortages.

LACK OF WINTER RAINS

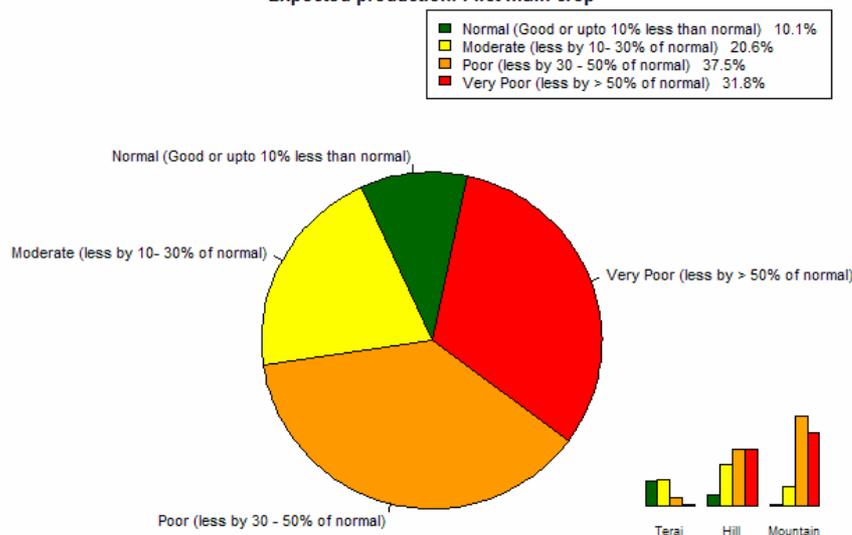
Most of Nepal has not received any rain since the sowing of the main winter crops of wheat and barley in November and December 2008. The overall impact of lack of rainfall on crop production has been severe.

The Hill and Mountain districts have been particularly affected, with the Far- and Mid-Western Regions experiencing the worst drought conditions. Minimal precipitation and snowfall in the Far- and Mid-Western districts during February, and in Central and Eastern Nepal during March, was too little too late to improve the crop situation. Localized hailstorms in Kathmandu at the end of March did significantly damage crops.

The harvesting of the main winter crop, wheat, started from mid-March in the Terai and in some lower belts of the Hill Districts. Harvesting will continue in the Hills and Mountains until the month of June depending on altitude.

The WFP Food Security Monitoring and Analysis System (FSMAS) indicates that crop losses will be more than 70 percent in some areas of Bajhang, Baitadi, Achham and Rolpa. Crop production decreases between 50 to 70 percent are expected in many areas of the Hill and Mountain districts of the Far- and Mid-Western Regions and in the northern areas of Rasuwa and central portions of Kavre in the Central Region. Most other areas in the Hills and Mountains are expected to incur

Expected production: First main crop



Graph 1

crop losses between 30 to 50 percent. In most Terai districts the production is expected to be normal.

These estimates are similar to those made by the District Agriculture Development Offices.

Household interviews among 725 farmers in 9 Mountain, 12 Hill and 6 Terai districts, indicate that 70 percent of them expect poor to very poor crop production this year. Only 10 percent of households expect normal production, and the remaining 20 percent expect a moderate decline in production (Graph 1).

The household survey confirms that the most worrying scenario is developing in the Hill and Mountain areas. In the Terai, most households responded that wheat production will be normal to moderate.

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS' FOOD STOCK

This worrying outlook for the crop situation in the Hill and Mountain zones will have the most serious implication on households with low food stocks.

Average household food stocks are currently 20 percent less than the same period last year (January – March) – a significant decline. Current food stocks are barely sufficient to cover people's food needs until the wheat harvest begins. As the outlook for this harvest is bleak, the lean season will be more severe, with households facing food insecurity at the end of April. The severity of food insecurity will continue to worsen until the maize harvest in September and August.



Table 1 provides an estimate on how long average household food stocks will last given the expected production losses.

An almost immediate impact will be felt in areas with extreme and very poor crop production. Coupled with continuing high food prices in these areas (as reported by the FSMAS Market Watch) the food insecurity situation in these areas will become alarming towards the end of April

PEOPLE AT RISK OF HIGH AND SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY

A situation of high to severe food insecurity is likely to occur in areas impacted by poor to extremely poor crop production in the Hills and Mountains of the Far- and Mid-Western districts. In some areas where the summer crops were also badly affected last year (Crop Situation Update # 9) the situation is even more alarming. This includes districts such as Bajhang, Bajura, Dailekh, Rolpa, Humla, Mugu, Kalikot, Jumla, Dolpa, Jajarkot and Rukum. WFP food assistance and other public works programmes and safety nets have contributed to improving household food security in many areas.

According to FSMAS monitoring data, one third of the population faced with the prospect of a poor to extremely poor crop harvest have benefited from WFP support in the past three months. In areas where more than half of the main crop is lost, this percentage is 16 percent. On average these households have received 60 kg of rice in the past 3 months. With a family size of 7 and assuming an average daily need of 500 grams of cereal, this provides sufficient food for about 17 days.

Given the poor crop outlook, extended assistance will be needed to protect households from severe food insecurity.

Map 1 provides an overview of the VDCs most affected in districts for which data were available.

Comparison between household data from the first quarter of 2008 with the same period in 2009 reveals that irreversible household coping strategies have increased.

Production estimate	Average food stocks last:
Extremely poor (>70% less than normal)	Less than 2-3 weeks
Very poor (50-70% less than normal)	Less than 1 month
Poor (30-50% less than normal)	1-2 months
Moderate (10-30% less than normal)	2-3 months
Normal up to 10% less than normal	3-4 months or more

Table-1 Post-harvest household food stocks

Almost one in three rural households are selling household assets compared to one in five households in the first quarter of 2008. Similarly the number of households selling agricultural assets has increased substantially (23 percent compared to 17 percent in 2008).

Taking into account the poverty rates, a conservative estimate of more than 2 million rural people in the areas covered by the FSMAS may be directly impacted by the winter crop losses and likely to face high/severe food insecurity in the coming months unless additional assistance is provided.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As an immediate response, WFP will increase the level of ongoing operations in the affected areas. WFP is currently feeding 1.5 million people in these areas. As a secondary response, given the anticipated severity of the impact of drought this year, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in collaboration with WFP and FAO will undertake a rapid crop and food security assessment mission to further assess the situation and determine required action. The results will be ready by mid-May.

Emergency Alerts

Emergency Alerts are produced by WFP Nepal as part of the Nepal Food Security Monitoring and Analysis System (FSMAS).

The FSMAS is currently funded from a DFID contribution in support of WFP's operations in Nepal.

All information products produced by the Food Security Monitoring and Analysis System are available on the UN Nepal Information platform (www.un.org.np) or on the WFP website: www.wfp.org/food-security

For more information please contact:
 Food Security Monitoring and Analysis Unit
 United Nations World Food Programme
 Patan Dhoka Road, Lalitpur
 PO Box 107
 Tel 5542607 ext 2420-5



Expected Wheat Crop Production

March 2009

