

## Introduction

This bulletin reviews general food security related issues in the current context of Nepal in WFP programme districts from January to mid March, 2004.

Observations are based on field data, quantifiable indicators, and anecdotal information systematically collected by WFP field monitors since the end of 2002.

## Highlights

The lean season is in its most difficult months in the chronically food insecure districts of Nepal. Production from the harvests of the last quarter of 2003 has been mostly consumed and many households will traditionally suffer food shortages until the next harvests in April /May 2004. As the lean season advances, coping indices show a deterioration in household level food security as compared to previous months in most of the survey districts while local conditions have also created some difficult situations. Northern VDCs of Dailekh, for example, are said to be facing difficult circumstances following low maize production caused by heavy rainfall and windstorms in October 2003 and current wheat production also below normal levels due to inadequate rainfall. However, food availability, in general terms, does not appear to be significantly worse than usual at this time of year.

**A** fifteen day blockade by Maoists, which began in early March, is having a strong impact with shortages of basic commodities and price increases commonly reported in most districts of the western region. This blockade was extended to some district headquarters in the mid and far western regions in the third week of March. Feedback from the districts suggests that these blockades may be further prolonged.

The security situation has deteriorated in the central eastern region during this reporting period and continues to be volatile in the far and mid western regions. Exposure of WFP and other development field staff to questioning from both sides in the conflict is becoming commonplace in many districts as are demands for donations, with up to 25% of salary requested from some staff. WFP staff refuse to meet these demands.

**M**obility of people and goods into and within districts remains subject to locally announced restrictions. The overall situation has been significantly exacerbated by the current blockade and varies from district to district. Almost one third of the WFP monitors are also restricted in their movements as a result of the blockades. In some districts, such as Dailekh and Rolpa, businessmen need permission from district administration to move food items to the rural areas. However, within rural areas food movement is often reported to be unrestricted. In

Sindhupalchok, food items such as beaten rice, biscuits and noodles, are reported not to be allowed to move from the district headquarters to the interior parts by the security forces. Similarly, locally grown foods are often not allowed by the Maoists to be taken to district headquarters. With the exception of the recent impact of the blockades, mobility of people does not appear to be widely restricted but the Maoist system of passes, visas and permission is compulsory in almost all of the survey districts where they have influence.

Development agencies are coming under more consistent pressure from Maoists in many districts, but particularly from the mid western region, to officially coordinate their activities with the insurgents at the field level. A Maoist NGO coordination unit is reported to have been established in Surkhet. This is widespread but has been strictly requested in districts such as Rolpa and Kalikot.

**By** Mid March, 111 Quick Impact Projects (QIP) had been approved for SAPPROS, DEPROSC and WVI to implement in the districts of Bajhang, Bajura, Mugu, Dolpa, Kalikot, Rukum and Jumla. Implementation of these projects, representing some 485mts of rice in support of more than 3000 vulnerable households, is now beginning.

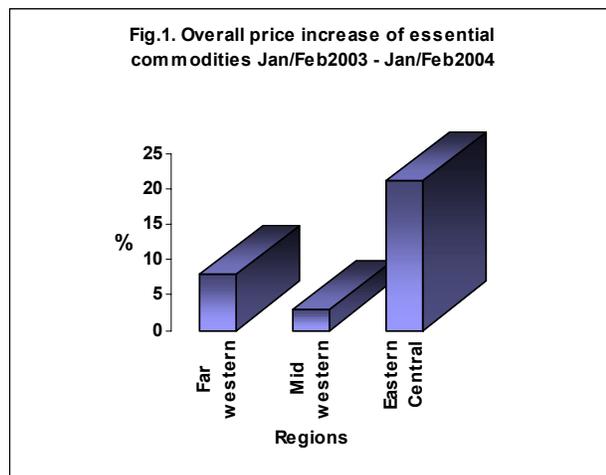
Development projects in Dailekh and Bajura, suspended as a result of the murder of two development workers in Dailekh and the theft of WFP rice in Bajura, restarted in the third week of February. The donor community received indications that a secure environment would be ensured in Dailekh allowing for the resumption of development activities. In Bajura, the transporter replaced the stolen rice.

Seasonal migration to India has started slowing down with less than 4,000 people recorded as having migrated through Nepalgunj border point between mid January to mid March 2004. This represents a 75% reduction as compared to the last quarter of 2003. Most out-migrants still cite regular economic reasons for their movement while 5 of 20 interviewed migrants reported insecurity as the main reason. Some out-migrants were seen to be returning to Nepal in accordance with their regular seasonal cycles. Lower than normal wage rates in India were reported as one reason for early return.



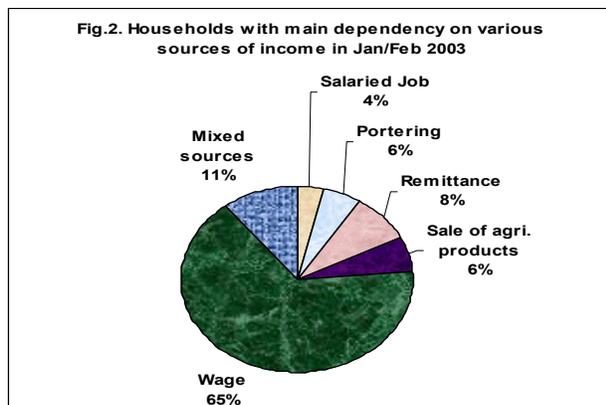
## Overview

Across all surveyed communities prices of essential commodities are some 3% higher at the beginning of 2004 as compared to the last quarter of 2003 and 12% higher when compared to the same period last year. Prices of essential commodities have generally increased by 3% in the mid western region and by 21% in eastern central region as compared to the same period last year (Fig.1). The significant price increases in the central eastern region are probably caused by the increased insecurity and influence of the Maoists.

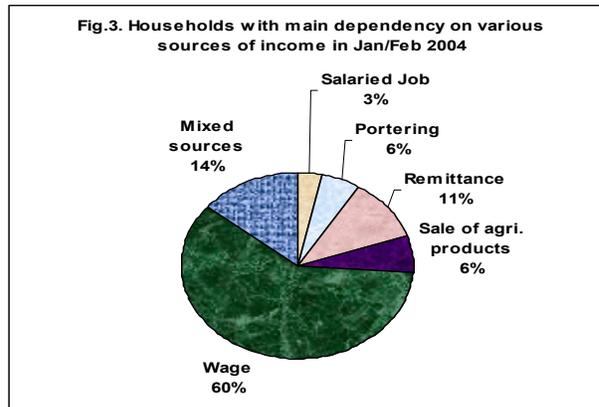


However, in the Terai districts of Dhanusha, Siraha and Rupandehi, significant price increases in essential commodities, varying from 38 to 59% have been recorded over the last quarter and 31 to 47% year on year. This may be explained as a result of the more rapidly declining security situation and increased restrictions on movements in these districts as there are no other obvious factors which appear to have triggered these increases.

Households reporting themselves to be mainly dependant on wage labour as a source of cash income have decreased from 65% to 60% when compared to the same season last year implying a reduction in wage labour opportunities within the districts. For the same period, there was an overall increase of 3% in the number of households depending on remittances as their main source of income while dependency on



portering and the sale of agricultural products remained unchanged (Fig.2 and 3).

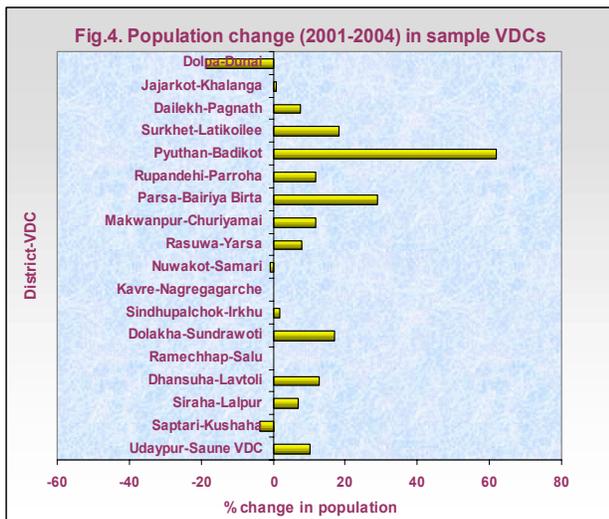


In this reporting period, dependency on wage labour appears to be highest in the central eastern survey districts and lowest in the far western hill and mountain districts at 70% and 50% of households respectively.

Food stocks are declining at the household level but, as the harvests had been generally good in October/November, the number of households still relying on their own production is some 7% higher than for the same period last year. At the same time, there is some 16% increase in number of households currently relying on food as wages for labour instead of cash indicating higher food availability as compared to the same period last year. Food availability appears to be significantly better in the mid western region where the number of households still relying on household production was reported to be 19% higher as compared to the same period last year.

Population estimates were recently collected by WFP monitors through key informants in sample VDCs from 18 districts in the mid western and central eastern regions and compared to 2001 census data. The key informants were asked to estimate the population of their respective VDCs, excluding people who have permanently migrated but including those who have temporarily left for seasonal migration. In most of the sample VDCs, the key informants indicated some degree of increase in population figures as compared to the 2001 census. Only the sample VDC from Dolpa showed a significant decrease of 19% in population as compared to the 2001 census. While the estimates of the key informants, and the census data itself, may be questioned, the degree of correlation between the estimates and the census are indicative of some degree of reliability. The results (Fig.4) suggest that there has been no mass movement of people in terms of permanent migration from these VDCs since the population census in 2001. Results are still pending from sample VDCs in 14 districts from the mid and far western regions.





### Regional updates

Far western hill and mountain districts		
<i>Bajhang</i>	<i>Achham</i>	<i>Dadeldhura</i>
<i>Bajura</i>	<i>Baitadi</i>	
<i>Darchula</i>	<i>Doti</i>	

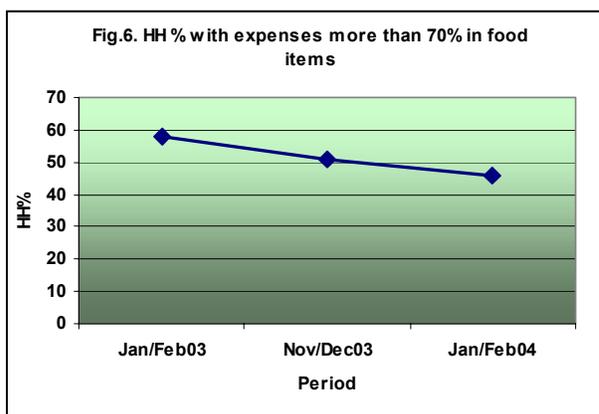
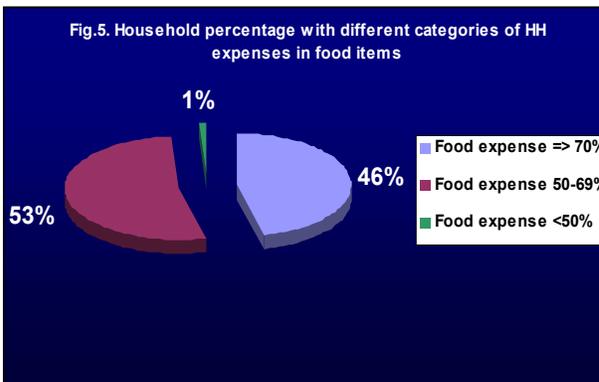
Overall food availability is not giving cause for concern in these districts although Bajura is affected by the Maoist restrictions on the movement of commercial food items from Sanfe, Achham to the district headquarters. The Maoists have requested WFP to advise them locally when WFP food is supplied to Bajura. In Sanfe, the security forces did not let WFP food move to Mangalsen in February with the explanation that it could be looted by the Maoists due to their anniversary activities.

Mobility of people is not generally seen as a problem in these districts although the recently imposed blockades are having a negative impact on movement both to and within districts. Even before the blockades, in Bajura and Darchula, outside visitors had to take permission or visas to move into the Maoists areas of influence. In Achham, the Maoists restricted mobility of people for two weeks in mid February because of their anniversary activities.

Maoists have different responses to NGO/INGOs in various districts. In Bajura, in general, NGO staff are reluctant to carry out field work because of restrictions imposed by the Maoists and pressure to make formal agreements. Maoists have also been restricting NGO work based on their own project evaluations and have, for example, recently criticised a seed support programme in Achham.

Teachers and government staff continue to be obliged to pay some 5% of their salary as a donation to Maoists in all survey districts of this region. As well as this, other taxes are imposed. For example, in Darchula, Maoists are reported to collect up to Rs.500 from each truck owner per trip and up to Rs.2,000 from all business people.

In the far western region, more than half of the survey households reported household expenditures on food items to be between 50 to 69% of the total income. 46% reported more than 70% of their total income expended for food items (Fig. 5). However, as compared to last year, the number of households with expenses of more than 70% on food items appears to be decreasing (Fig. 6) indicating a general improvement in terms of community level food security. In the far western region, Achham has the highest number of survey households with expenses of more than 70% of their total income being spent on food items and Darchula the lowest with 98 % and 24% of households respectively in this category.



Mid western hill and mountain districts and western terai district			
<i>Dolpa</i>	<i>Kalikot</i>	<i>Jajarkot</i>	<i>Rolpa</i>
<i>Salyan</i>	<i>Humla</i>	<i>Mugu</i>	<i>Pyuthan</i>
<i>Rupandehi</i>	<i>Jumla</i>	<i>Doti</i>	<i>Dailekh</i>
<i>Rukum</i>	<i>Surkhet</i>		

The 15 northern VDCs of Dailekh are reported to be facing difficult circumstances in terms of food security largely due to a significant reduction in maize production last October because of poor rainfall and wind-storm damage. Also, the current wheat production due to be harvested in April is expected to be lower than normal due to untimely rainfall. In Baluwatar VDC from this part of Dailekh, prices of essential commodities show a 15% increase as compared to the same season last year. Lower frequency of cereal consumption as compared to other sample communities and some 94% of average household expenditure going on food stuffs indicate the vulnerable situation of this VDC in Dailekh. For the rest of the region, food availability is said to be normal for this time of year.



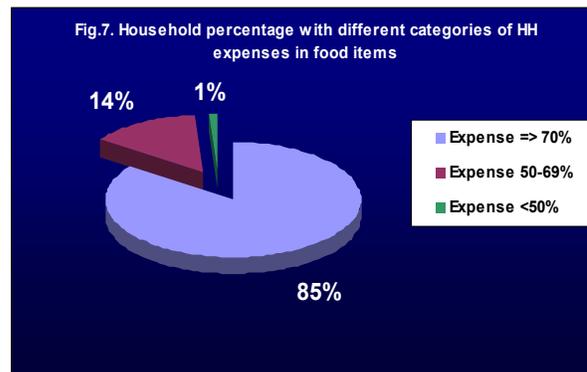
Movement of people within and into the districts of this region was possible prior to the imposition of blockades. However, visitors in Kalikot, Humla, Mugu, Jumla, Jajarkot and Dolpa have required passes / visas or permission from the Maoists. Since mid February, the Maoists have completely restricted the movement of people in Rolpa and Jajarkot, initially because of their anniversary activities. Similarly, they have restricted access to some of the VDCs in Rukum and Surkhet because of their anniversary activities and *bandh* programme during February. Since the beginning of March, interior parts of Rukum are said to be completely inaccessible because of an indeterminate *bandh*.

In most of the districts, prior to the blockades, food movement was reported to be possible but some districts have been said to face difficulties with the movement of commercial food items. In Dailekh and Rolpa, business people need permission from the district administration office to carry commercial food items into the rural areas. In Rolpa, one business person is allowed to carry only 500 kgs of food items per month to the rural areas. This level of supply is not said to be sufficient to meet the demands of the people in rural areas who are said to go to bordering districts such as Pyuthan to purchase commercial food items. In Rolpa, Surkhet, Jumla and Kalikot, Maoists have restricted the movement of food items from rural areas to district headquarters. This has adversely affected rural people who can no longer easily sell surplus commodities. In Jumla, Maoists have been reported to fix the prices of commodities in some local markets at levels lower than those in the district headquarters.

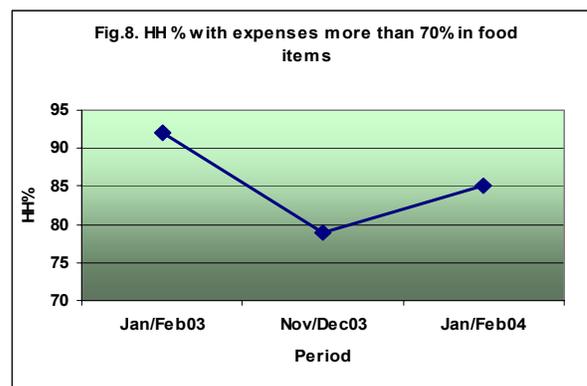
In this region, Maoists have strongly indicated their wish to collect donations from, and co-ordinate with, NGOs/INGOs for the implementation of development activities and have restricted the movement of some NGOs on the grounds of insufficient co-ordination.

Like in other regions, donation from teachers and government staff are said to be in commonplace. Likewise, business people and contractors are said to pay up to Rs.40,000 to the Maoists in Salyan and Humla. Similarly, staff from some development organisations are said to have paid up to Rs.35,000 to the Maoists in Dailekh. Seasonal crop donations, although less commonplace than before, are still evident in this region. In Salyan, some 4 kgs of seasonal crops per household are donated while in Kalikot this figure is as high as 25 kgs thus impacting negatively on the food stock situation of rural households.

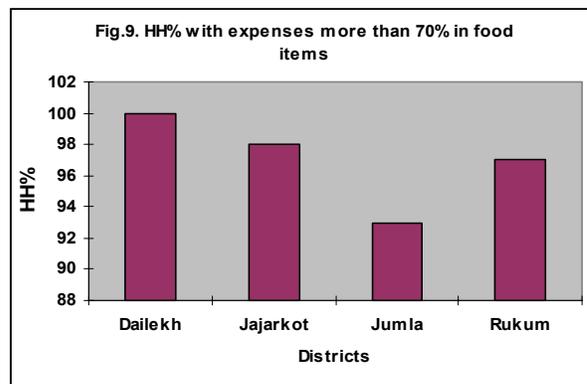
In this reporting period, 85% of survey households in this region showed total household expenses for food items beyond 70% of their total income (Fig.7).



However, the number of households with food expenses greater than 70% of their income still appears to be lower than in Jan/Feb last year (Fig. 8).



As compared to other survey regions, the mid western region appears to have the highest proportion of household income spent on food. Within the region itself, households from Dailekh, Jajarkot, Jumla and Rukum appear to be spending the greatest proportion of their income on foodstuffs indicating a higher level of vulnerability (Fig. 9).



**Central eastern terai, hill and mountain districts**

**Dhanusha Dolakha Kavre Makwanpur Nuwakot Parsa Ramechhap Saptari Sindhupalchok Siraha Udaypur Rasuwa**

Although this reporting period covers the peak of the lean season, the food security situation is not reported to be critical in this region because of household food stocks and the active traditional coping mechanisms of going to India and other parts of Nepal to find work.



In districts such as Kavre, Parsa, Makwanpur, Saptari, Dhanusha and Nuwakot, the general security situation has deteriorated as compared to previous months with an increasing number of incidents, search operations and increased Maoist activity. This has led to some difficulties in the mobility of people in parts of most districts.

Generally, movement of food into and within districts is said to be quite normal in this region. However, in Sindhupalchok, some food items such as beaten rice, noodles and biscuits are not allowed by the security forces to be carried into the interior parts of the district. Maoists also restrict movement of locally grown food to the district headquarters. Similarly, in Parsa, villagers have to take permission to sell locally grown food outside their villages. In Dolakha, business people are allowed to carry only 5 sacks of food from district headquarters to the villages.

As in other regions, donations to the Maoists from teachers and government staff are said to be commonplace. Teachers are requested to pay one days salary a month. In Dolakha, some VDC secretaries are said to have been requested to pay up to Rs.50,000 from their regular development budget. In Udaypur, villagers have to pay 5% crop donation to the Maoists.

In the eastern central region, some 71 % of households were reported to spend more than 70% of their total income for food items. Similarly, 28% of the survey households were reported to fall within the category of households with food expenses ranging from 50 to 69% of their total income (Fig.10). As compared to the beginning of 2003, the number of households with food expenses of more than 70% has been seen to go down (Fig.11). Within the region, Rasuwa, Makwanpur and Udaypur appear to have most households with food expenses of more than 70% of their total income (Fig.12).

