

Introduction

This bulletin reviews general food security related issues in the current context of Nepal in the 32 WFP programme districts from mid March to mid May, 2004.

Observations are based on quantitative and qualitative field data, and anecdotal information, systematically collected since the end of 2002.

Highlights

For the first time, data collection by WFP field monitors was significantly affected by the security situation. The Maoist imposed blockades in various parts of the country meant that some 30% of the fixed WFP sample communities could not be visited in this reporting cycle although some degree of movement was possible in all programme districts at some time during the reporting cycle. The mid and far western districts were more affected than those in the central and eastern regions.

While some high altitude areas are still completing the harvest of winter crops, the most difficult months of the lean season would normally be coming to an end at this time of year. Preliminary estimates from the Ministry of Agriculture from April 2004 indicate that, despite lower rainfall, there was an overall increase in wheat production of some 3.2% as compared to last year. However, in most survey districts, harvests of winter wheat and barley are reported by WFP monitors to be significantly lower than average due to inadequate, or absent, rainfall during the cropping season. In many districts harvests will only be sufficient to sustain households for one month or less after which as many as 45% of households will be totally dependent upon coping mechanisms to meet their requirements. In Dailekh, for example, wheat and barley production was reported to be as low as 30% of average yields. The national press also recently carried articles indicating critical food shortages in Darchula, Mugu, and Bhajang. WFP information suggests that food availability at the household level is clearly worse in these districts as compared to normal years. Bajura, Dailekh, Mugu and some parts of Dolakha appear to be most affected due to a combination of poor winter harvests, delayed planting of new crops such as millet and potatoes, and reduced availability of some wild foods and herbs. However, information received from WFP field monitors from these districts indicates that, despite increased levels of hardship, the situation is not yet critical and that traditional coping mechanisms are so far adequate, but that the situation requires close monitoring.

Maoist imposed blockades, combined with general strikes called by various parties, had a significant impact in parts of the country during this reporting period. The mobility of people and movement of essential commodities, including food items, to and within the rural areas, was significantly restricted. Bajura was seriously affected creating further con-

cerns over food availability throughout the district with the prices of essential commodities in monitored markets increasing by 16 - 36 % as compared to pre blockade prices.

Significant price increases of essential commodities have been seen in Bajura, Dailekh, Siraha and Parsa districts for this reporting period as compared to the same period last year. This was not noted in the last reporting period and is probably the direct result of the poor winter harvests and / or the effects of the blockades. The increases vary according to the type of commodity. For example, in Parsa significant increases in the prices of wheat and kerosene are apparent while in Siraha it is wheat, pulses and cooking oil that have gone up. Similarly, increases of up to 23% in the prices of rice, wheat, barley, cooking oil and kerosene were seen in Bajura while Dailekh faces increases of up to 14% in the prices of cooking oil, kerosene, millet, maize and barley.

During this reporting period 130mt of rice was distributed in Jumla, Kalikot, Dolpa, Rukum, Bajhang and Bajura under Quick Impact Projects. Altogether 199 projects have so far been approved in the 9 Quick Impact Programme districts, equivalent to 690mt of rice for some 11,700 participants.

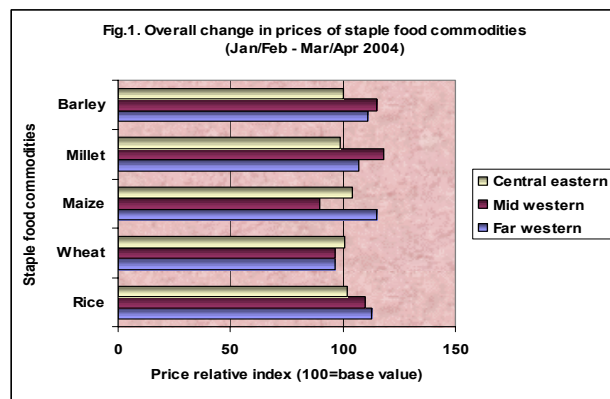
Following serious demands and threats made by the Maoists against a number of development agencies, GTZ, SNV and DFID were forced to suspend their support to the Rural Community Infrastructure Works (food for work) programme in Humla, Mugu, Jumla, Dolpa and Kailali on 16th May, 2004, affecting some 55,000 beneficiaries. In the absence of essential technical assistance provided by these agencies, WFP also suspended its support to RCIW in these districts. When it is clear that staff can operate in a safe environment support to RCIW in these districts will resume. Pressure for aid agencies to officially register and coordinate their activities with the Maoists is increasing in many parts of the country, particularly in the mid and far west.

Out migration of people through the three main border points in the mid and far west is reported to be very low, which is normal for this time of year. However, out migrants who would normally be returning to their districts of origin at this time of year for the new agricultural season appear to be significantly lower than usual, probably delaying their return as a result of the blockades and deteriorating security situation.

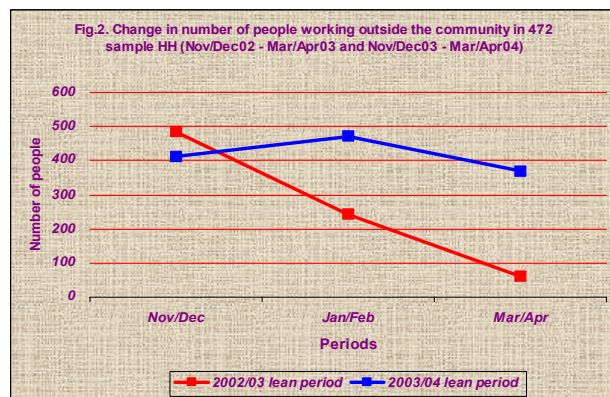


Over-view

When compared to the first two months of 2004, prices of some staple food commodities have increased more in the mid and far western districts than in the central eastern region where prices appear more stable. For example, the average price of rice has increased by some 13% in the far western districts and 10% in the mid western districts while the central eastern region faces only nominal increases of some 2%. Similarly, far and mid western regions face increases of between 7 - 18% in the price of millet and 11 - 15% in the price of barley for the same period. In the far western districts the price of maize has increased by up to 15% (Fig.1). These short term price increases are clearly linked to disruption in supply caused by general strikes and blockades but the situation has been further exacerbated in those districts which suffered poor harvests.

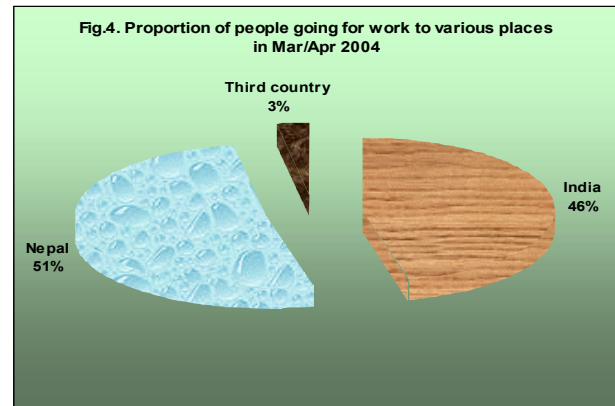
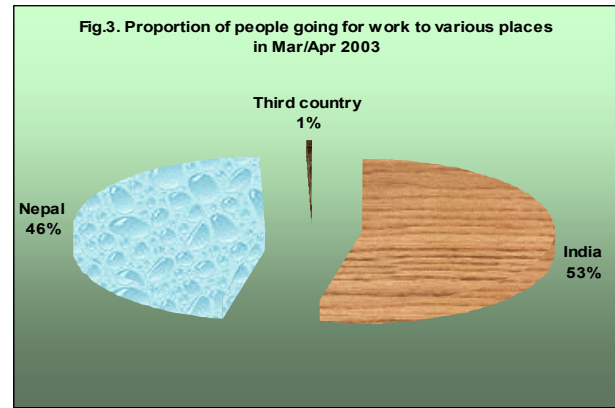


When reviewing migration data collected from the same 472 households, from 64 communities, across 22 districts, for the lean seasons of 2002/3 and 2003/4 no increase is noted in the absolute numbers of people leaving their communities to seek work elsewhere. However, from the figures of those absent from their communities in Jan/Feb and Mar/Apr of 2004 it is evident that those who left for the 2003/4 lean season are delaying their return (Fig.2). This is most likely due to the increased number of blockades and strikes over recent months. As the return of migrant labourers to their communities is normally linked to the new agricultural season, it remains to be seen if these delayed returns could impact negatively on the next agricultural season due to reduced labour availability.

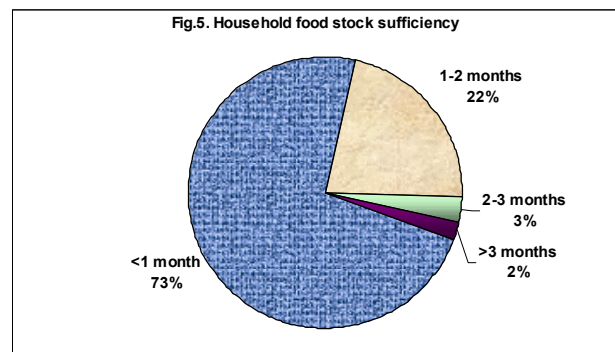


Information from the same households also indicates a slight change this year in the destinations of those

people who normally leave their communities to supplement their incomes. The proportion of people going to India is reported to have decreased by 7 % while those going to third countries and other districts within Nepal have increased by 2 and 5% respectively (Fig. 3 and 4). The specific reasons for these changes are unclear.



Largely due to poor winter harvests, most households, from some 1200 regularly monitored across all survey districts, reported low household food stocks. Some 73% of households said they had food stocks for less than a month while only 22% and 5% of households reported sufficient food stocks for more than one and two months respectively (Fig.5). Faced with such significant shortfalls, 46 % of surveyed households stated that they would totally depend on coping strategies such as migration, skipping meals and eating wild foods. 40 % indicated that they would survive with their regular sources of food and cash income combined with some dependence on coping strategies. Only 14 % of households responded that they would solely depend upon their regular sources of food and cash incomes.



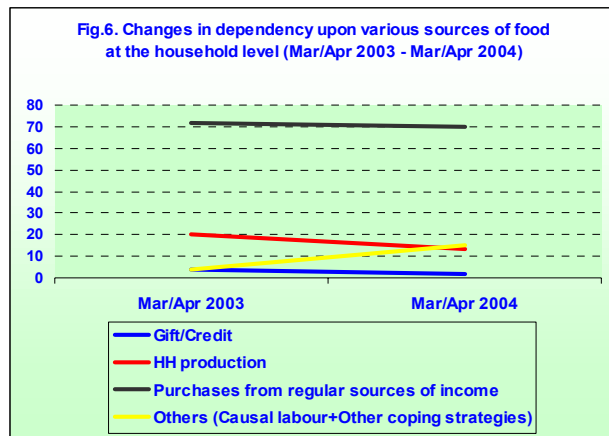
Regional updates

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>	

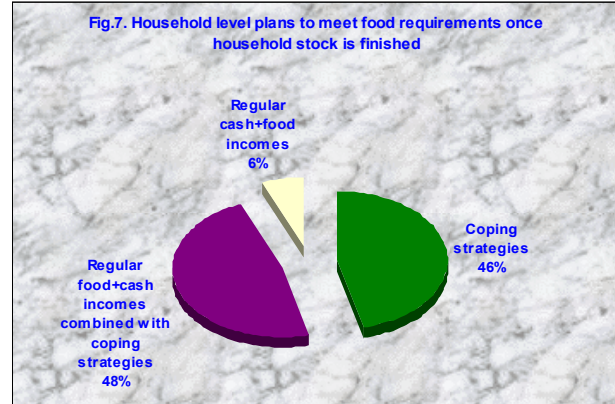
During this reporting period, overall food availability has been significantly disrupted by restrictions on the movement of essential commodities and people as a result of Maoist imposed blockades. Baitadi, Bajhang, Bajura and Darchula are worst off in terms of food availability as the effects of the blockades have been exacerbated by a significant reduction in the winter wheat harvest due to poor or absent rainfall during the cropping season. The harvest was reported to be reduced by approximately one third of the normal production in most districts. Bajura has particularly felt the effects of the blockades with prices of essential commodities increasing by some 16 - 36% in the monitored markets. The NFC is said to have received their allocated annual quota in Bajura but are reported to have already exhausted their rice stock. The people in Bajura are reported to be reducing the number and size of their meals and are collecting wild foods as their main coping mechanisms. Despite this short term increase in food deficits at the household level, out migration as a coping mechanism is not yet reported to have increased in the sample communities, but it is unclear if this is linked to the strikes and blockades, or not.

Within this reporting cycle, data shows that there is a change in the levels of reliance on different sources of food at the household level as compared to the same season last year. The number of households mainly relying on household production decreased from 20% to 13% whereas those households mainly relying on coping strategies has increased from 4% to 15%. The number of households mainly purchasing food from regular sources of income has not changed significantly (Fig.6).



Levels of household food stocks are low in most parts of this region. More than 75% of survey households in all districts, except Baitadi, reported food stocks sufficient for less than one month. Household stocks in Baitadi were reported as sufficient for between 1 and 2

months. Only 6% of households said they could cover their shortfalls with regular sources of food and cash income and maintain their normal lifestyles. 48% indicated that they would survive with a combination of regular sources of food and cash combined with a mix of coping strategies and 46% said they would solely depend on coping strategies such as migration, reducing the number and size of meals, and collecting wild foods (Fig.7).



Insecurity due to the conflict has significantly deteriorated during this reporting period. In districts such as Dadeldhura and Doti there are regular curfews from 20.00hrs to 05.00hrs. Maoist blockades have significantly affected the mobility of people and goods into and within the districts. Achham, Bajhang, Bajura, Dadeldhura and Baitadi all have high levels of general insecurity with a high frequency of reported incidents and search operations. The abduction of villagers and teachers in Dadeldhura and Bajura, confiscation of documents related to community organizations in Achham, anti-caste discrimination activities in Darchula, and the imposition of new civil regulations on marriage, citizenship and land sale in Bajhang, have all been reported contributing to an increased sense of insecurity in this region. Donations to the Maoists continue to be commonplace across this region.

Also related to the increased insecurity are anecdotal reports from Bajhang that only 10-15 people a day were said to be returning to the district as part of the seasonal return which was said to be much higher in the same season last year. This is reflected in the analysis of data from survey households as shown in Fig. 2.

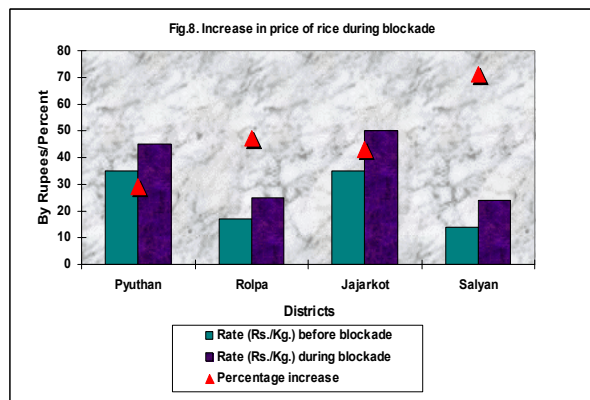
Mid western hill and mountain districts and western terai district

<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>Dailekh</i>	<i>Rukum</i>	<i>Surkhet</i>	

In most of districts of this region, apart from Humla, Kalikot, Pyuthan and Rupandehi, harvests of winter wheat and barley are reported to be as low as 30% as compared to normal years, largely due to untimely or absent rainfall. In Dailekh all survey households reported household food stocks for no more than 10 days. Protracted and unpredictable blockades imposed by

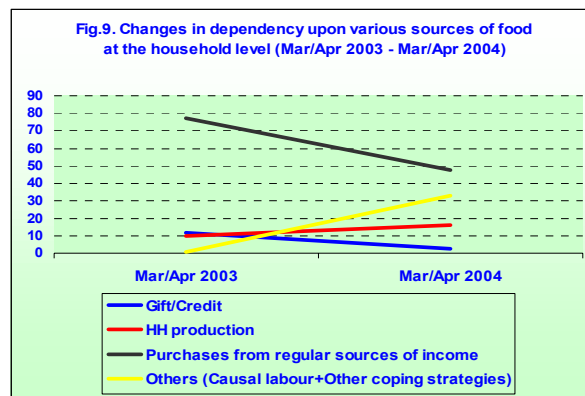


the Maoists across this region have caused significant disruption in the movement of essential commodities, including food items, thus further impacting on food availability. In some of the districts such as Pyuthan, Jajarkot, Rolpa and Salyan, the price of rice was reported to have increased from between 29% - 71% during the recent blockades (Fig.8). Even in the absence of blockades, the movement of food commodities to the district headquarters is highly restricted by the Maoists in Kalikot, Rolpa and Jajarkot. Similarly, the security forces in Kalikot, Salyan and Surkhet often restrict movement of food to the VDC level. In Surkhet, traders are said to have to pay between 20 and 200 rupees to the Maoists in each time they transport commodities.

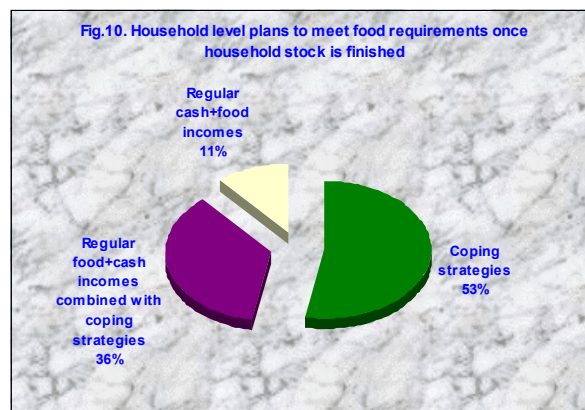


In Jumla, Mugu and Dolpa poor and inadequate rainfall will also negatively affect the next crops of millet and potato. The prevalence of wild foods and local herbs, traditional coping mechanisms for the people of these districts, have also been negatively affected by adverse weather conditions this year. Some non sustainable coping mechanisms such as skipping meals, selling of household assets and domestic animals, eating green stalks of wheat, and seeds of other summer crops such as millet, potato, maize, are already seen to be in use to varying degrees in most parts of Jumla, Humla, Mugu, Dolpa and Dailekh. In Surkhet, Dailekh, Mugu and Kalikot, seasonal donations of food and crops and the collection of money from teachers to help support the Maoists remains commonplace. In Humla, Rukum, Rolpa and Jajarkot, the Maoists are said to be restricting the movement of people for out migration exacerbating the difficult circumstances of poor households in these districts.

As the sources of food supplies become less dependable, increased levels of vulnerability at the household level are reflected in the changing ways that household food security is maintained across this region as compared to the same period last year. Households relying mainly on purchases of food from regular sources of income decreased from 77% in 2003 to 48% in 2004 while those depending completely on casual labour and a mix of other coping strategies increased from 1% to 33% (Fig.9).



Levels of household food stocks vary from district to district in this region but are generally very low with the exception of Salyan, Dolpa and Jumla where household stocks were sufficient for up to one to two months. In Dailekh and Surkhet household food stocks were reported as being only sufficient for as little as two weeks while more than 75% of households in other districts reported food stocks sufficient for only two to four weeks. Some 53% of survey households said they would have to solely depend on coping strategies to cover their food deficits, 36% said they would combine regular sources of income with coping strategies, while only 11% said they could fully meet their requirements from regular sources of cash and food income (Fig.10).



The security situation has markedly deteriorated over this reporting period. The blockades called by the Maoists significantly affected the mobility of goods across the region adversely affecting all activities, including those remaining development activities. Even in the absence of blockades, mobility of people is highly limited by the pass system from the Maoists together with regular patrolling and questioning from the security forces. In Salyan, Surkhet, Dailekh, Rolpa, Humla, Mugu and Jumla, curfews have been imposed in and around district headquarters at night.

In Dailekh, Rukum, Surkhet and Mugu, the Maoists have strictly asked NGOs and other organizations to make agreements to carry out any development work resulting in decreased levels of NGO activity.



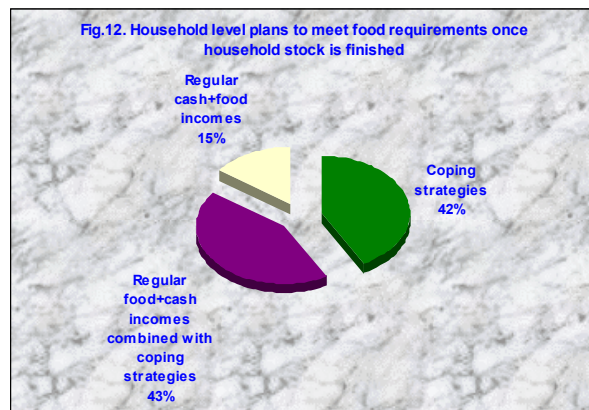
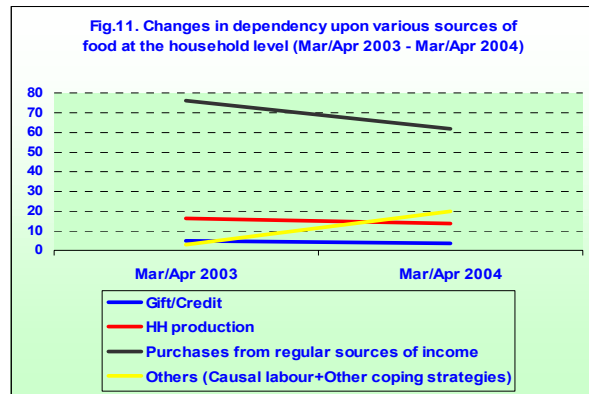
Central eastern terai, hill and mountain districts
Dhanusha Dolakha Kavre Makwanpur
Nuwakot Saptari Parsa Siraha
Rasuwa Udaypur Ramechhap Sindhupalchok

In general, the food security situation of this region remains relatively unaffected by the situation of general insecurity in Nepal. However, some hilly parts of northern Udaypur and some southern parts of Kavre are said to be facing food shortages because of an extended lean season due to late harvests. This may have been further exacerbated by reports of regular feeding of visiting Maoists to those areas. In northern parts of Dolakha, winter wheat production was reduced because of damage caused by snowfall and has also led to some food shortages there. The people in this area are reported to be managing by employing traditional coping mechanisms such as loans from more wealthy people and moving to nearby urban areas in search of casual labour. In Siraha and Saptari, some 20% of regular wage labourers are said to be facing unemployment because of a reduction in the amount of construction works caused by significant price increases in materials such as cement and steel rods. The affected labourers are said to be collecting fuel wood to compensate thereby putting increased pressure on forested areas.

The changes noted in the reliance pattern on various sources of food at the household level for this reporting cycle as compared to the same period last year are not as significant as with the other regions. Nevertheless, there is a notable increase in the use of coping mechanisms with a corresponding decrease in the level of food purchases made from regular sources of income indicating some degree of increased vulnerability to food insecurity in this region as well (Fig.11).

In most districts of this region more than 70% of households reported having food stocks sufficient for less than one month. However, this is not of such concern as households in this region generally have a higher level of access to regular sources of food

and cash incomes as compared to other regions. However, some 42% of households still expect to solely rely upon various coping strategies to fulfill their food requirements for some months (Fig.12).



Movement of food is restricted in some districts such as Dolakha and Sindhupalchok where traders need permission from the security forces to carry certain food items to the interior parts of the district.

The security situation has deteriorated in this region with general strikes called by the Maoists combined with many security incidents, search operations by the security forces, and increased levels of Maoist activity. The Maoist pass system for visiting VDCs also limits the movement of people within and into the districts. The regular collection of donations by the Maoists from teachers and business people continues to be commonplace.

