

Executive Brief: **Iraq**

Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) - 2007/2008

Overview

The general economic decline in the aftermath of the 2003 war, further exacerbated by 13 years of economic sanctions, has had severe humanitarian consequences. The food security situation of the Iraqi people remains poor with large segments of the population continuing to depend on monthly food rations provided by the Public Distribution System (PDS), the main public safety-net system in Iraq.

In February 2006, sectarian violence sparked by the destruction of the holy Shrine in Samarra led to the displacement of 1.5 million people, one of the largest displacements ever recorded, which further worsened the security situation and jeopardised the social security networks. However, since the second half of 2007, the economy has somewhat improved due to a slight improvement in the security coupled with enhanced humanitarian efforts by the international community. The situation nonetheless remains highly volatile and any deterioration in the security would impact negatively the PDS and the overall delivery of humanitarian assistance.

WFP and the Government of Iraq¹ conducted a Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) in collaboration with UNICEF, FAO and WHO in late 2007 as a follow up to the last food security survey undertaken in mid-2005. The latest survey is designed to provide updated information on the food insecurity and malnutrition, its causes, risks and where pockets of vulnerability exist.

The current Emergency Operation of WFP helps to cover the food needs of over 750,000 displaced people who are unable to get the PDS rations due to incomplete coverage or administrative difficulties associated with displacements.

How was the survey done? The findings are based on a review of secondary data and a household survey. A total of 26,000 households were interviewed covering the entire country (18 Governorates). The anthropometric data analysis was based on a survey of 24,000 children under-five years.

How many households are food insecure?

Under the PDS, each Iraqi national is entitled to a monthly food basket with a nutritional value of 2,200 Kcal per day.² However, there are continued shortfalls and disruptions. For instance, in 2006, PDS supplied only 60 percent of the caloric requirements, in 2007, the rate dropped to 51 percent and in November 2007, an estimated 46 percent of households did not receive wheat while 73 percent did not get rice.

The extent of households' food security is determined by the PDS deliveries coupled with the capacity of the households to complement or replace the PDS rations through market purchases.

An estimated 930,000 people are food insecure, representing 3 percent of the total population. Furthermore, an estimated 6.4 million, almost 22 percent of the population, are extremely dependent on the PDS. They would become food insecure unless the safety net programmes are run sustainably given that half of them live on less than US\$1 a day.

Despite its magnitude, the current food security situation is an improvement when compared with 2005 where an estimated 4 million people (15.4 percent of the population) were classified as food insecure and an additional 8.3 million people as vulnerable (31.8 percent).

Where are the food insecure households?

While 70 percent of the population lives in urban areas, the food insecurity and poverty are disproportionately concentrated in the rural areas—66 percent.

The study identified four clusters or groups of districts:

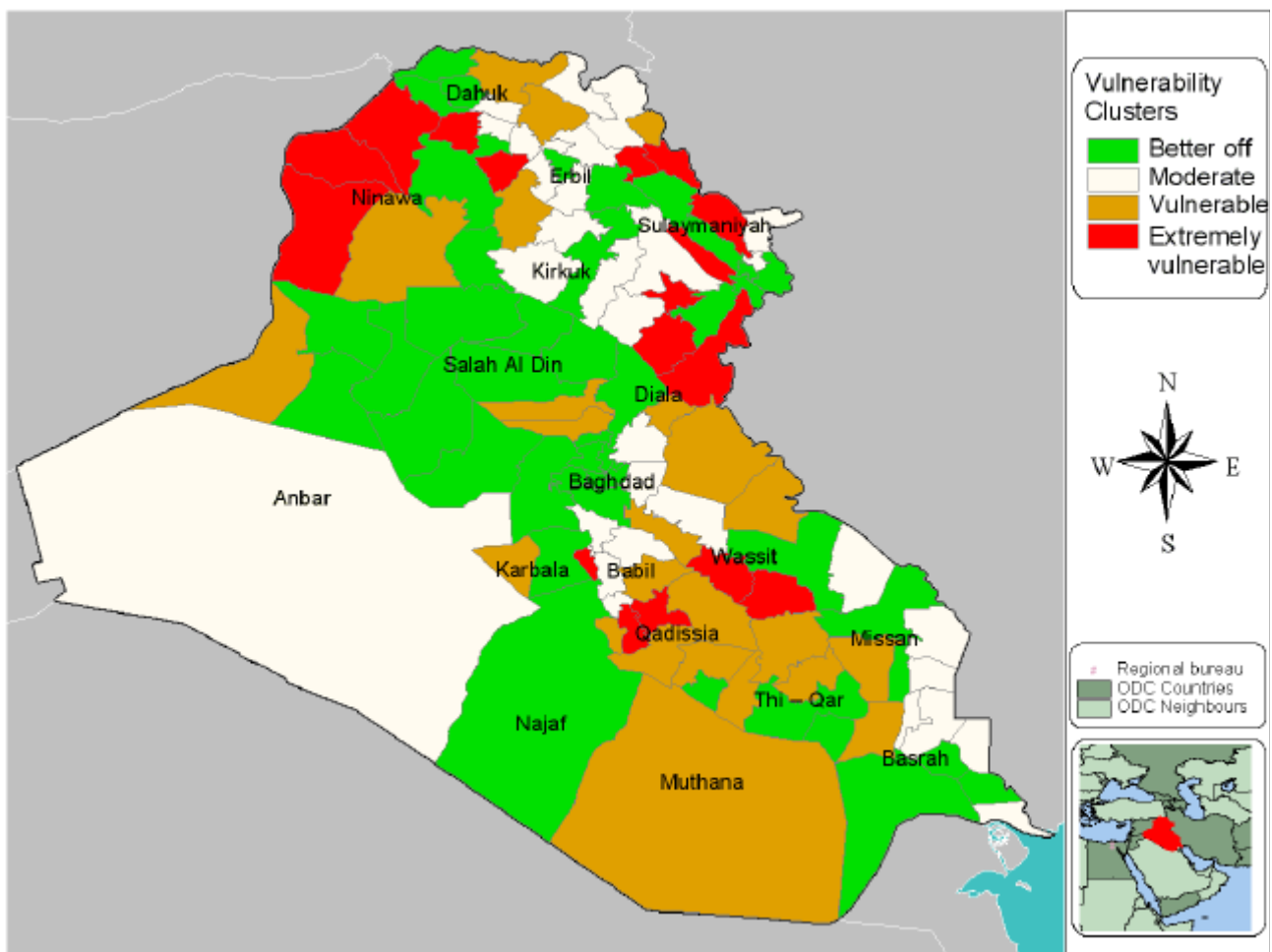
- "Better off" cluster consists of 44 districts, encompassing 18.4 million people of which only one percent were identified as food insecure and an additional 5 percent as vulnerable to food insecurity. This group mainly

¹ The Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology (Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation), the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office and the Nutrition Research Institute (Ministry of Health)

² The ration contains wheat, rice, milk, sugar, vegetable oil, pulses, infant formula, detergent and soap.

consists of urban districts (66 percent) characterized by low to moderate levels of poverty (below national average) and food insecurity (less than 10 percent) as well as lower malnutrition rates, with stunting rate at about 20 percent and wasting 3 percent.

- “Moderate” cluster is made up of 30 districts with a total population of 4.9 million people, of which 2 percent are food insecure and an additional 10 percent are vulnerable to food insecurity. This group mainly comprises of rural districts (75 percent), characterized by low levels of food insecurity and malnutrition with a poverty level closer to the national average.
- “Vulnerable” cluster consists of 24 districts representing 3.4 million people of which 5 percent are food insecure and an additional 15 percent are vulnerable to food insecurity. This cluster is characterized by moderate to high levels of poverty (more than 50 percent) and malnutrition (wasting more than 8 percent and stunting greater than 30 percent).
- “Extremely Vulnerable” cluster is made up of 17 districts with a total population of 2.9 million of which 16 percent are food insecure and 32 percent are vulnerable to food insecurity. This cluster has the highest rates of food insecurity (greater than 30 percent) and poverty (more than 60 percent) in the country. Five districts out of the 17 also reflect alarming levels of stunting.



What are the causes of food insecurity?

Chronic poverty, inadequate purchasing power, lack of dietary diversity in the absence or shortfalls of the PDS, are all contributing factors to household's food insecurity.

Food availability: The country has continued to experience an exceptional shortfall in food production and supplies due to the conflict and insecurity. The Government relies heavily on imports. The domestic production of wheat, which is the main staple food, represents at most one third of total supply in any given year. Whereas almost 18 percent of the rice consumed is produced locally.

Food access: Current livelihoods cannot guarantee access to sufficient food at the household level. Wealth and income are key determinants of the households' food security situation. About 83 percent of the food insecure households belong to the poorest groups. Iraq has a high unemployment rate (15%) and low income rates (47 percent of the households earn less than US\$2/capita/month). The poorest have often the lowest skills and experience difficulties to enter into the current job market.

Disparities between urban and rural regions are evident through higher rates of rural unemployment (22%) and lower access to essential services such as water, sanitation, education, health, and transportation.

Markets: Domestic production and the trade systems are largely state-dependent. The trading structure consists mainly of private traders who handle the distribution of the food rations. The development of the local trading infrastructure and large food markets has been hampered by conflicts, the state controlled PDS and the government monopoly on the grain and oil crops. Other markets (i.e. vegetable and fruits) are free but not well developed.

In some districts households are highly dependent on the PDS, as local food production is extremely low and they are at a considerable distance from the closest food market.

Malnutrition: the global acute malnutrition level is classified as acceptable, with about **4.7 percent** of children under-5 wasted and **21.8 percent stunted**. Stunting is linked to the household's level of food consumption, income and expenditure while wasting is more likely due to poor infant feeding practices and incidence of illness.

While 54 percent of households used iodised salt, the level of iodine in the salt was found to be adequate in only 23 percent of the households.

Who are the food insecure households?

Household characteristics associated with food insecurity include:

- The poorest who lack sufficient income to complement or replace the monthly food basket when PDS distribution is disrupted;
- Non-skilled workers, agricultural workers and the unemployed heads of households;
- Women headed households;
- Current or recently resettled IDP households;
- Households with chronically malnourished children;

The less affected households are mainly self-employed individuals in non-agricultural sectors and public service.

Response recommendations

Recommended food interventions:

The establishment of any food assistance programme should include the following elements:

- Provide targeted food assistance in collaboration with PDS to the most vulnerable and food insecure groups;
- Support initiatives to improve mother and child nutrition and caring practices;
- Scale up micronutrient programmes for iodised salt as well as vitamin A and iron fortification;
- Provide food for education in the poorest areas to ensure that children meet their nutritional needs and continue to attend school, with particular emphasis on female attendance.

Recommended non-food interventions by priority area and priority group

Iraq's food security is linked to the recovery of the economy, the country's reconstruction and improvements in the basic services such as water, electricity and healthcare.

The Government is taking measures to restructure the economy towards a more liberalised system. Economic growth is expected to lead to job creation, better earning opportunities and increased incomes. This would enhance food availability as well as food access and therefore improve food security.

Even when economic growth takes hold, a national safety net system which targets the most vulnerable would be needed. There is a general consensus that indefinitely maintaining the policy of universal coverage through the PDS no longer fits within the country's strategic recovery and development objectives. A more targeted and efficient system that provides 'needs based' social protection is required.

WFP and other UN and non-UN organizations can assist with the foundation for a sound and self-sustaining private sector which has the capacity to deliver essential services, specifically for the food supply chain. New policies and programmes designed to enhance food security would need to reflect an accurate understanding of the nature and causes of Iraq's current food insecurity and the unique circumstances that perpetuate it.

In this regard, the CFSVA recommended that more attention should be given to:

- Capacity building for national institutions to enhance their ability to monitor and analyse food security trends;
- Capacity building for public and private institutions in establishing adequate food and non-food based safety nets targeting the most vulnerable segments of the population;
- Improving maternal and child care practices;

- o Working to improve nutrition through appropriate investments in agriculture, rural development, water supply and sanitation, social protection, education, gender and community-driven development.

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