

Overview

Despite its natural resources (ecological diversity), its geographic location (six neighbouring countries and access to the sea) and political and social stability, Cameroon continues to face food security problems. The growth in food production has lagged behind population growth resulting in a situation where only 80 percent of the food needs of the population are met, compared to 96 percent in 1980.

Cameroon ranks 144th out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index. About 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.¹ Rural poverty ranges from 33 percent in the South province to 56 percent in the Extreme North province.

Until recently, most food security information was available only for the northern parts of the country which are chronically food deficit. Little information if any was available for the other provinces. To fill this gap and to have a complete overview of the food security situation in the country, WFP, in collaboration with the Government and other partners, conducted a Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA). The CFSVA provides an in depth understanding of food security and vulnerability situation of rural households which can then be used to design and implement humanitarian and development assistance programs for various segments of the population.

How was the study done? It is based on an analysis of primary data collected from 2,013 households in 10 provinces. A secondary data review and a market analysis were also conducted. The data was collected during the lean season, except for the North and Extreme North provinces where data collection took place in the intermediary season.

How many households are food insecure or vulnerable?

About 2.8 million people are food insecure representing 26 percent of rural households.

Among them, 970,000 people have poor (9 percent of rural households) and 1,832 million have borderline food consumption (17 percent of rural households).

Drought is the main risk facing households. About 80,000 households living in the north and south of the country are at increased risk of food insecurity due to frequent droughts. These also include 18,000 people who are chronically food insecure people.

Where are the food insecure and vulnerable households?

At the time of the survey, the highest prevalence of households suffering from poor or borderline food consumption was in the following provinces: Centre (52 percent), Northwest (40 percent) and East (35 percent).

However the highest prevalence of food insecure and vulnerable households is usually in the Provinces of Extreme North, North and Northwest as these provinces are subject to recurrent droughts and also have the highest concentration of poor households. As the data was collected during the intermediary season, their food consumption patterns were acceptable.



Who are the food insecure and vulnerable households?

Households that are likely to be the most food insecure tend to be the ones who engage in livelihood activities such as daily wage labour, handicraft and farming. About 4 percent of households rely on daily wage labour. Farmers represent 43 percent of the population and people living on petty trade represent 11 percent of the population. Farmers, agro-pastoralists and daily wage labourers are the most vulnerable groups to food insecurity in case of a drought.

In the Northern part of the country, food accounted for more than 40 percent of the households' total expenditure at the time of the survey. Since these households mainly depend on the food markets, their level of vulnerability is expected to rise as food prices traditionally increase over the marketing year, peaking in the lean season.

¹ According to the data of ECAM II (Enquête Camerounaise Auprès des Ménages), 2002

Households with the following characteristics have better food consumption patterns:

- Households who own livestock (about 87 percent of agro-pastoralists have acceptable food consumption patterns);
- Households who receive remittances (half of the households with members living outside the country receive remittances);
- Households who own the land they cultivate. They represent 69 percent of households. Households' food consumption is linked to the size of the land cultivated.

Households living on income from cash crops (cacao, coffee, banana, cotton and rubber) usually have better food consumption.

Why are people food insecure or vulnerable?

Food availability: Cameroon is a food deficit country. The supply side is constrained by weak network organisation in an environment of increased demand from neighbouring countries. Food prices have increased by 5 percent per year since 2004.

Food access: Rural households have access to food mainly through their own production. They rely on the sale of produce to buy additional food or non food items. Households' own production is often sufficient for the majority of households. However in the Provinces of the North and Extreme North (where poverty is chronic), many households are at risk given the high frequency of droughts and the weak capacity of households to cope.

Agriculture suffers from soil poverty due to rain drainage and over exploitation, lack of agricultural inputs, inadequate rain or animal attacks in the Sudan-sahelian area. Households also have difficulties accessing credit.

The lack of storage and conservation structures minimizes the quality and quantity of stored food stocks. The presence of these structures could have helped households to meet their food requirements during the lean season.

A majority of villages are inaccessible due to poor roads and heavy rains, particularly during the rainy season (from June to September). The poor road infrastructure prevents proper functioning of markets and access to schools and health services.

Utilization, health and nutrition: Infrastructure and medical staff are lacking in rural areas. About 62 percent of villages have no health centre and 75 percent have no pharmacy. Access to potable water is poor. The main source of water is surface (44 percent of households), particularly in the West where rains are more abundant. Wells are another important source of water.

Wood is used for cooking which contributes to deforestation.

The data from the *Enquêtes Démographiques et de Santé* (EDS) shows that the nutritional status of vulnerable groups has been deteriorating since 1991, in particular between 1991 and 1998. According to the latest MICS study (2006), about 30 percent of the children below the age of 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition and almost 13 percent are severely stunted. Acute malnutrition affects 6 percent of children in its moderate and 1.2 percent in its severe form. Underweight affects 19.3 percent of children under 5 in its moderate and 5.2 in its severe form.

Response recommendations

The full list of recommendations is available in the report.

Agricultural production and food consumption: An agricultural policy with the objective of increasing the agricultural productivity is necessary. In this context, it is recommended to:

- Facilitate access to agricultural inputs and credit to augment production capacity;
- Promote soil conservation technics;
- Build up granaries and storage facilities in villages;

Village isolation

- Strengthen the road network by rehabilitating damaged roads or constructing new ones;
- Ensure maintenance of bridges and drainage facilities;

Food security: The Government should develop and implement a National Food Security Policy. It is also recommended that a harmonised food security framework be developed to: 1) strengthen livelihood analysis; and 2) streamline and use existing food security monitoring and early warning system for the monitoring and analysis of agricultural production, households' access to food, agricultural markets and cross border flows of commodities.

Health and sanitation

- Increase households' access to health services, through a wider coverage of health infrastructure;
- Promote access to potable water through well construction and promote water treatment methods;
- Promote the use of latrines.

For more information, please contact:

Haladou Salha, WFP Country Director, haladou.salha@wfp.org

Arif Husain, Senior Programme Advisor, Food Security Analysis Service, arif.husain@wfp.org