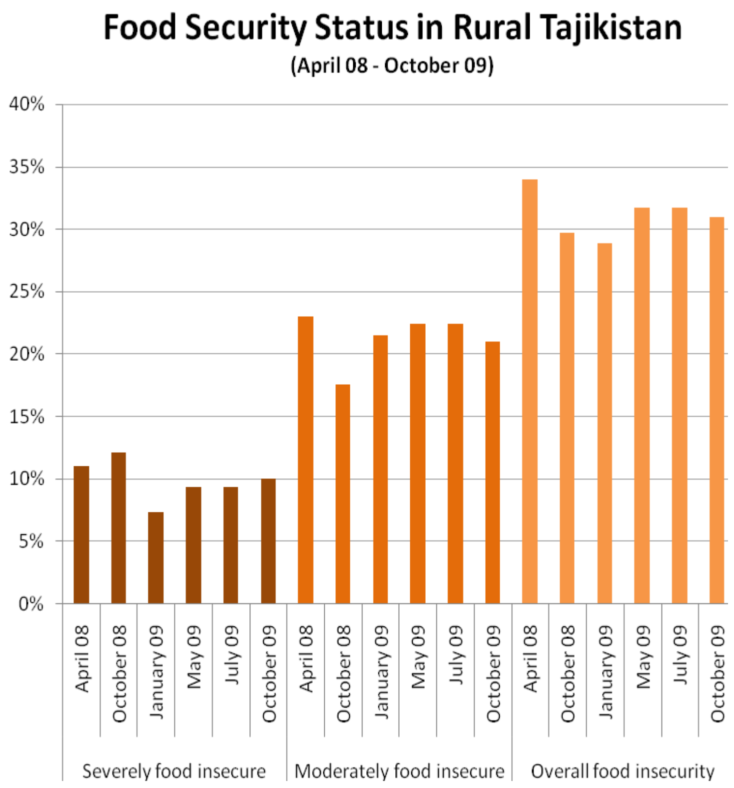
TAJIKISTAN FOOD SECURITY BULLETIN

DECEMBER 2009 – Number Five

The Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) provides a seasonal snapshot of food security in rural Tajikistan by analyzing data from 665 households and 475 key informants every three months. The FSMS can alert stakeholders to incidents of critical food insecurity requiring short-term interventions. The exact methodology is contained in annexes.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Generally, the overall food security situation has not changed since last round. **Moderate and severe insecurity remains at about 22% and 9% respectively**. The stability in food security is due to a good harvest of wheat and vegetables and to assistance provided to households affected by heavy rains, late frost and food price/ economic crises in certain areas.
- The **lack of improvement of moderate food insecurity** at a time when better physical access should allow households to be food secure is mainly due to external shocks such as a decrease in remittances, lack of employment opportunities, harvest failure, lack of drinking and irrigation water and human and animal diseases creating pockets of food insecurity.
- **Sughd and Khatlon are the most food-insecure regions**, due to economic shocks (especially the loss of employment and decrease in remittances). Long-term interventions, especially in agriculture (irrigation, seeds and access to land) and job and assets creation integrated with nutrition projects are recommended for the most vulnerable households in these areas.
- The **outlook for the next three months is uncertain.** The good harvest provides households with land and livestock with good stocks and assets to go through the winter. But households normally dependent on remittances or relying on begging and borrowing of food will be in need for immediate assistance. The food price and economic crises still threaten fragile progresses made by some households that have managed to improve their livelihoods. Moreover, there are good signs that the **construction sector in Russia is picking up** after months of slow activity. The next migrations could bring a most needed income to rural households.



WFP thanks the U.K. Department for International Development for its support of the FSMS.

Overview of the overall household food security

Overall the situation has improved compared to previous rounds but remains similar to last year at the same period. The situation has improved since the peak of the crisis and the lean season in May as many indicators show. Chronic food insecurity remains at the same levels as last year in October.

Two main issues are of major importance for the food security situation for the past three months: agriculture and income sources, especially remittances.

Agriculture and good harvest

The findings from this round's survey confirm that agriculture has played a major role in maintaining food security at an acceptable level for households owning land and having had access to seeds, fertilizers and irrigation water (mostly rain over the past six months). Households also owning livestock and having access to fodder and veterinary services prove also to be better off than those without significant herds or those whose livestock was affected by the seasonal diseases.

The results from the Food Security Monitoring corroborate findings from the recent FAO Crop Assessment's as most farmers interrogated have reported the following:

- wheat harvest is for 40% of the respondents (50% of the key informants) better than average and for two third of them mainly due to good climatic conditions;

- potato farmers confirm a better harvest despite some late frosts and flooding in some districts (Asht, Murghab, Ghonchi, Fayzobod, Nurobod and Jirgatol);

- one third of the households and 505 of the key informants report less fruit harvest than the previous year due to bad climatic conditions;

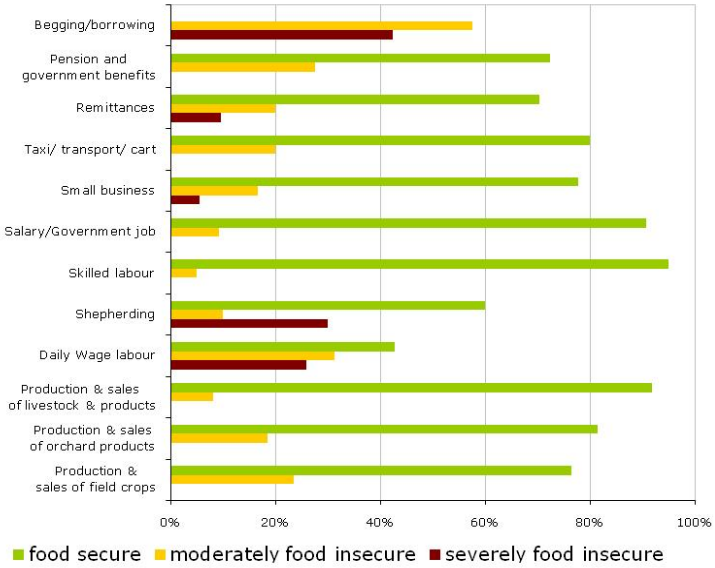
- the main constraints to cropping are also confirmed by the survey and remain the same chronic difficulties faced by farmers more or less all over the country: lack of irrigation water, access to only small acreage, lack of fertilizers, pesticides and machinery;

- three fourth of the villages report problems with irrigation (the ones who don't have any irrigation at all). The main problems identified are the lack of water at the beginning of the season and distance to the main canal.

- grazing and health conditions of livestock herds in most parts of the country have been reported by most owners as better than the previous year and have lead to a decrease of price for both meet products and hay. But seasonal diseases leading to loss of livestock are still reported (Qumsangir, Murghab, Nurobod, Fayzobod, Jirgatol and Jilikul) despite the fact that one third of the villages visited have a good access to veterinary services.

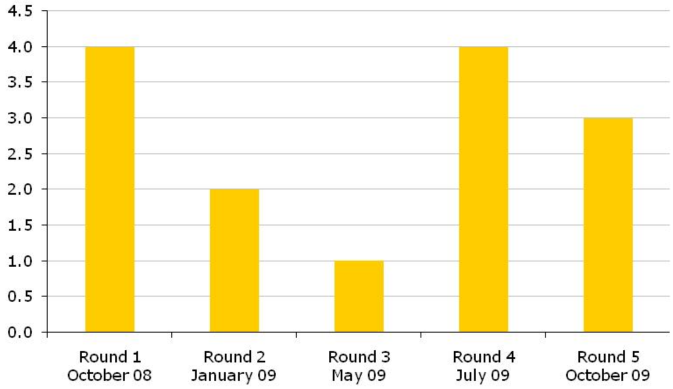
Although the impact of the good harvest and livestock conditions on food security is confirmed, pockets of food insecurity remain where shocks have prevented a good harvest and disrupt livelihoods dependent on agriculture and livestock (Asht, Jirgatol, Khuroson). In these areas, most households are still to recover from the shocks of the past three to six months. This confirms the still fragile state of the agricultural sector. The FAO crop assessment highlights that the increase in production of wheat and other cereals is mainly due to opportunistic planting on well rain-fed areas (confirmed but the result of this round of FSMS) and show that more work is need to give access to land to the landless and to irrigation to farmers and to provide them with basic infrastructures, seeds, fertilizers and machinery. As the figure below shows, households relying on the production and sales of crops, livestock and orchard products are less prone to food insecurity.

Livelihood and food security status



The harvest has also allowed households to build better stocks for the winter. 90% of the interviewees report having stocks this year (against 80% in October 2008). Wheat, potato and oil stocks are slightly better than last year at the same period and only vegetables and fruit stocks are lower confirming harvest failure in several parts of the country. But stocks remain of short duration and almost two thirds of the households interviewed report not having enough stocks to pass the winter.

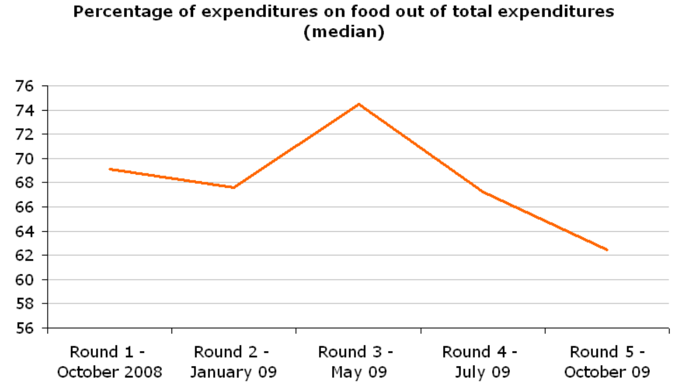
Fruits and vegetables stocks: average duration (weeks)



The good harvest also had an impact on where households get their food from, the proportion of their budget spent on food and the coping strategies used against shocks.

When it comes to the sources of food for the households, results show that 70% of the respondents get their food from the market (often the central market) and that the percentage of households getting food from their own production is slightly less than last year at the same period. Interestingly, less households borrow food from relatives and neighbors than last in May at the peak of the economic crisis. An increase in food received from gifts might be due to the Ramadan.

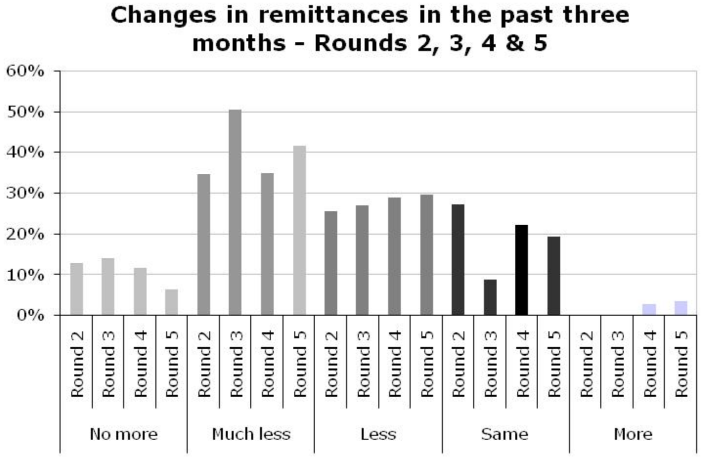
Households have also decreased their expenditures on food since May and compared to last year. This decrease has allowed increasing expenditures on health. The access to own production explains partly this decrease but decrease of prices of wheat could also be a reason.



Households have also reduced their use of negative coping mechanisms that would have influence their food consumption and diet as they have a better access at this season to food from their own production. Less households report reducing the number of meals eaten per day, borrowing food or relying on less preferred and less expensive food.

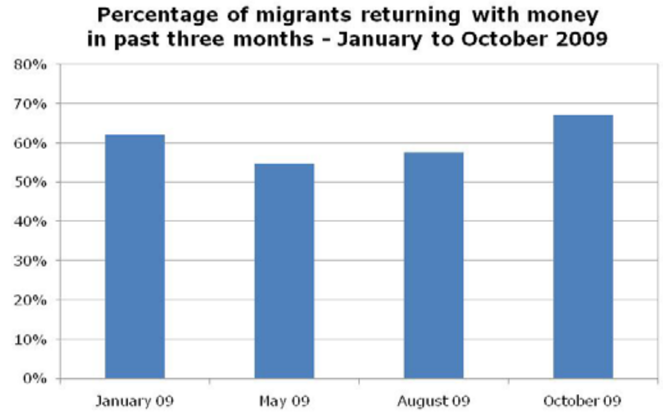
Migration, remittances and income sources

Data from the IMF show that this is at this season that migrants come back from Russia and, as a consequence, bring back the most remittances. But since the beginning of the crisis, remittances have decreased compared to last year's levels. The FSMS data confirm this tendency at the household level as results show a decrease by half on the number of households reporting receiving remittances since January: 70% of the households receiving remittances report receiving less than usual. While 50% of the interviewees reported receiving remittances in January, less than 25% did this round. Reports showing that the economy in Russia is recovering might explain why more households report this time that migrants come back with money compared to the peak of the crisis in May. This has a positive impact in households' economy in parts of the country where remittances constitute the main source of income.



Remittances now represent 20% of the main income sources and 10% of the second main income source for the sampled households. Most households are involved in agriculture but, as per the last Food Security and Poverty Bulletin of Goskomstat, the lowest wages and salaries in the real sector are observed in agriculture which would explain that salaries from the government (20%) and daily wage (17%) labor are among the main income sources of the rural households of Tajikistan. Pensions also represent the second and third income sources for 30% and 40% of the households interrogated. Reports of delay in receiving pensions confirmed by key informants might have a serious impact on food security for these households.

As for migration in general, recent reports show no decrease in the number of migrants that went to Russia since the beginning of the year despite the economic crisis. 85% of the households declare not having any migrant that left in the past three months and 91% do not report any returning migrant. This trend is normal for the season. There is also no increase in the number of families reporting using migration as a coping strategy. Earlier reports that migrants would come back en masse are still to be confirmed.

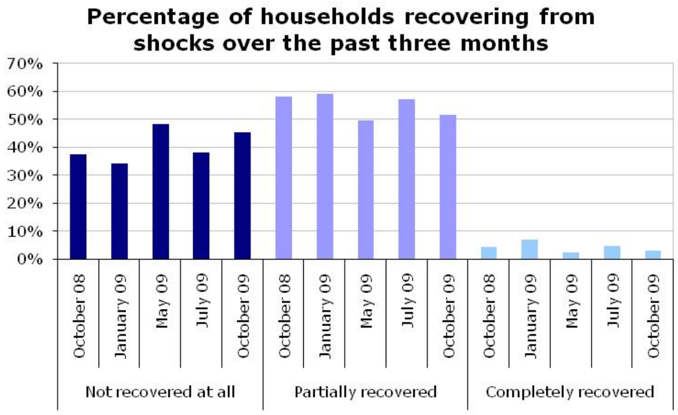


Questionnaires this round also tried to get a better understanding of the impact of the financial crisis on the labor market and of the importance of remittances. 82% of the key informants report that remittances received recently are mostly used for food. Chiefs of villages also pointed out that the main job opportunities in the past three months were in the agriculture (including livestock) and in migration. Findings show nonetheless that in zones affected by recent shocks show more returns of migrants, especially in Khuroson. These migrants mostly came back with money.

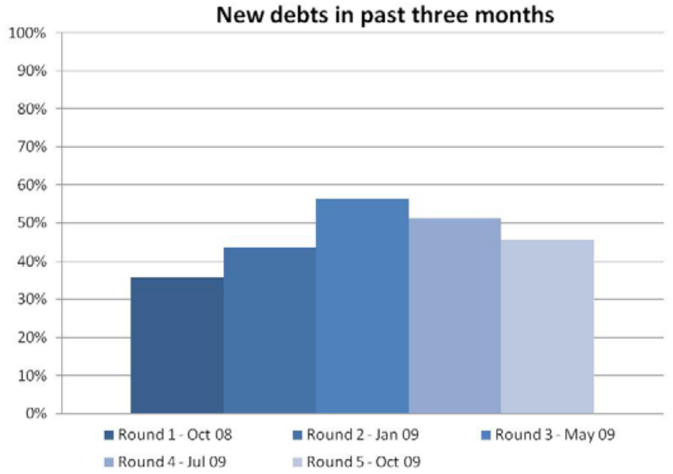
Causes of household food security over the past three months

Although fewer households blame the financial crisis for their problems or changes in expenditures, rural families are still facing several shocks, most of them chronic.

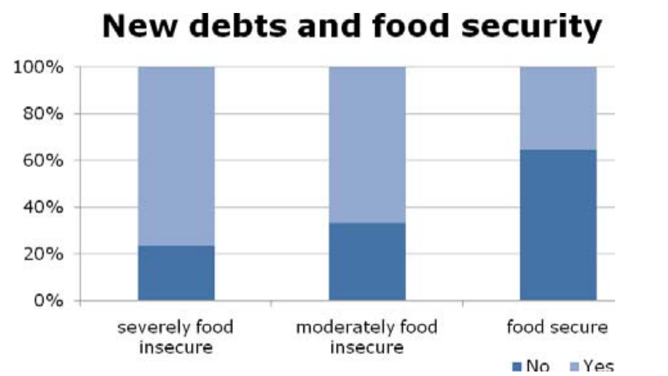
The main shock cited by households this round is still the unusually high food prices (42% of the households cite it as the main shock). But this claim is less frequent than in May when high food prices combined with the economic crisis where cited by all households as the main shock. This round, water issues (26%) together with reduced salary of a household's member, harvest failure and health issues (both for human and livestock) are the main shocks reported. These shocks are also reported as chronic in most zones where the survey is conducted. As the figure shows below, the percentage of households having not recovered from shocks is much higher than last year at the same period. This underlines the reduced capacity of households to cope with the shocks this year and especially since the beginning of the economic crisis.



This has lead households into debts. At the village level, 83% of the shop keepers interviewed reported giving credit to customers and that 42% of them are asking for more credit. These same shop keepers are among the households living of small business and who report "bankruptcy of small business as a main shock". Interviews in the shops in the villages revealed that 49% of the shop keepers declare that the costs of coming to market/shop are the main constraint to business as cost of transport have increased since the beginning of the crisis. At the same time, 64% of the store keepers report a price increase of their products in past three months. This explains also why more households prefer to rely on the central market than on the local market. The figure below show that since May, less households overall have contracted new debts but that, compared to last year at the same period, more households have.

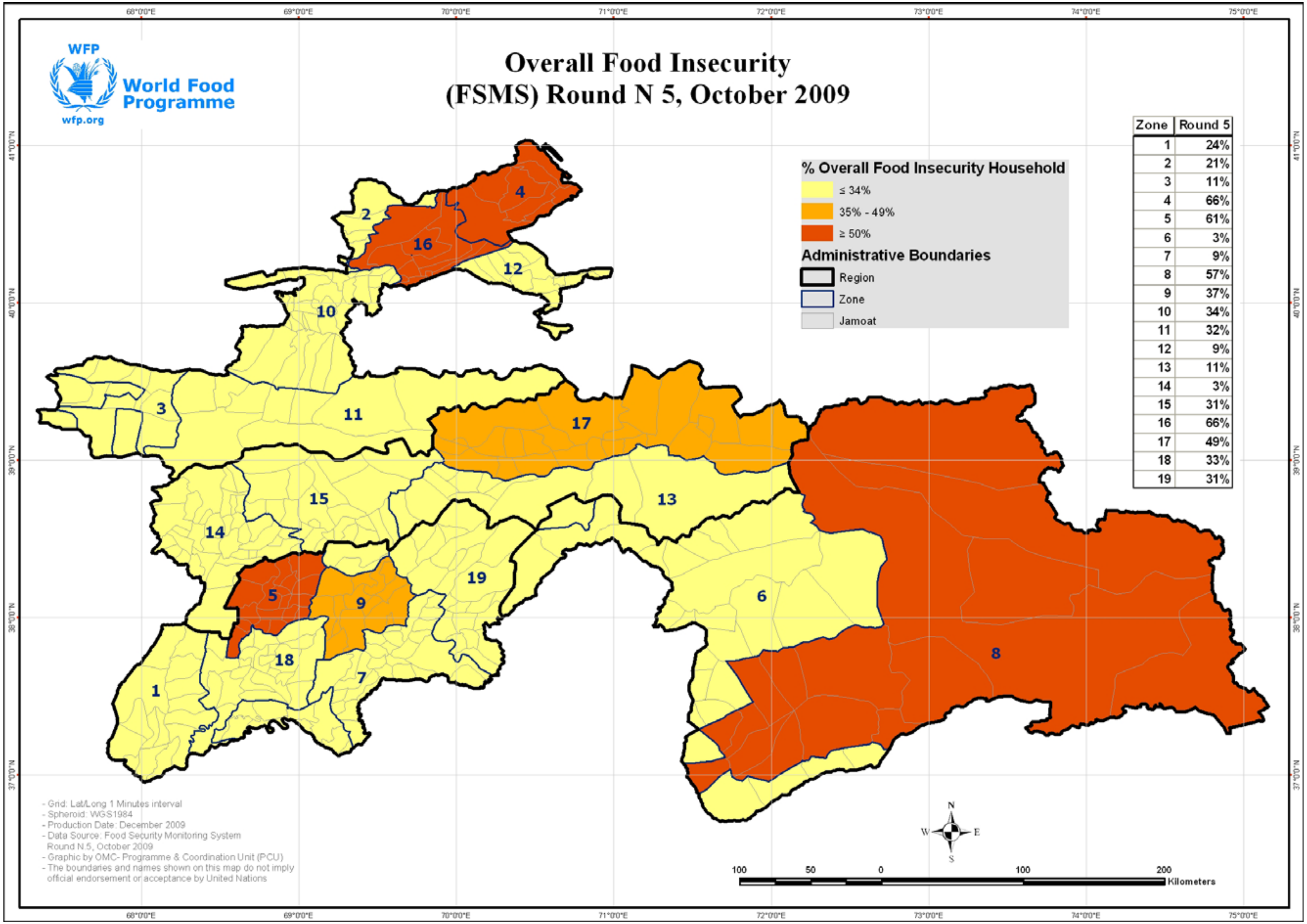


The debts are still mainly used for buying food. What has changed is that the amount of debts is higher compared to last year and longer to reimburse especially for the most vulnerable households and those affected by shocks. The increase access to credit confirms the financial problems households face and compensate for the loss of remittances. The graph below shows that households with debts are more likely to be food insecure.



Food insecurity in Tajikistan is also linked to the poor diet of the households. In this post-harvest season, food consumption is slightly better for households with access to their own production. Typically, at this season, the household diet will be made of cereals (7 times a week), vegetables (3 times), sugar (6 times) and oil/fats (4 times). But what is remarkable is the difference of diet between the better of and the most food insecure households. Households with a better consumption eat more fruits, meat and dairy.

Finally, findings from this round show that half of the households are considering their economical situation as worse than last year. Although the economical crisis is not blamed anymore for this change, the change in expenditure resulting from it is.



Jamoats selected: 1- Panj, 2- Avzikent, 3- Loiq Sherali, 4- Qirquduq, 5- Hiloli, 6- Vanj, 7- Zarbdor, 8- Vankala, 9- Tabnochi, 10- Mujum, 11- Urmetan, 12- Khonaobod, 13- Yakhakyust, 14- Navobod, 15- Gumbuloq, 16- Utkansoy, 17- Alga, 18- Jilikul, 19- Balkhob

Possible scenarios…

For the next three months, the food security situation of many households will depend on several factors:

- Nutrition: as high rates of wasting during winter months have been observed previously in Tajikistan and seem to be seasonal, a reduction to levels observed in winter months could be expected (both acute and chronic). Dietary diversity will still remain an issue in the coming months. Results from the UNICEF National Nutrition Survey late December should indicate the severity of the situation and guide appropriate interventions for the months to come.

- **Food consumption:** Food prices have continued their decrease but remain high. Some food items are even more expensive than ever (pulses). The high prices and reduction of stocks in the coming months might cause further deterioration of dietary diversity and related poor nutritional status (particularly chronic malnutrition).

- **Remittances and migration**: the contribution of remittances to household's income is confirmed to have diminished. The months to come are normally low in terms of transfers. Migration will keep the same pattern as previously unless the recent surge in the construction sector in Russia (mainly Moscow for the moment) is confirmed and push migrants to migrate earlier in the winter.

- **Employment**: as the financial crisis stabilizes, and the number of households reporting loss of income stagnates, households severely affected three months ago by the crisis have already found new sources of income: animal husbandry, daily wage labor and, for the most vulnerable, begging and borrowing. Their revenue has dropped compared to last year especially as daily wages continue to decrease in certain areas. It is not envisioned that employment will drastically improve in the coming months despite some investments (mainly in urban parts of the country). The winter months also present less opportunities for daily wage labor in agriculture which might force more households into negative coping strategies.

- **Expenditures**: Households' expenditures have already shown some changes mainly due to seasonal changes but also to the economic and high food price crisis. In the coming months, expenditures on heating should increase due to the start of the winter (as shown in October last year). Expenditures on health should remain high as well especially if the influenza outbreak is as severe as predicted by WHO. This combined increase of expenditures will affect the most vulnerable households.

- **Government's spending**: pensions and government salaries are now playing a central role in the total income of rural households. Delays and difficulties in receiving pensions have been noticed by key informants and households and will have a severe effect on households' ability to afford the basic food basket. The government has nonetheless increased salaries for certain civil servants in the social sector thanks to budget support from several donors. This might help compensate the loss of other income.

- **Food prices**: Prices normally go up after November for a month or so (see price trends in annex 1). But households benefiting from a good harvest should be able to compensate for this price increase and the higher availability in markets should allow for a stabilization of prices until the harvest. Good harvest in neighboring countries will also help keep prices lower than last year. The cost of the food basket has slightly decreased (TJS 88 per person per month compared to TJS 92 in May and 91 in October last year)

… and recommendations

There is an urgent need for a strategic approach to address nutrition and food security in an integrated way. Relevant actors should advocate for integrated strategies on the governmental level.

Addressing the immediate causes: health promotion campaigns addressing the individual and the whole community should address exclusive breastfeeding promotion, optimization of complementary feeding, good hygiene practices and optimization of micronutrient intake.

Addressing underlying causes:

- <u>Increasing food availability and access:</u> Food insecure households identified in the previous round are being assisted through food aid and agricultural programmes, but new vulnerable zones have come to light and particular attention should be given to the Rasht Valley and Murghab. The improvement of the situation in Khatlon and Sughd is only temporary.

- <u>Improving water quality:</u> As already indicated in previous monitoring rounds, government and partners should make water access (both for irrigation and human consumption) the main priority of the next months. Drastic and better coordinated responses are critical;

- <u>Disaster risk reduction:</u> As mentioned in the previous bulletin, the government and partners should continue to work together on disaster risk reduction projects. Tree plantation projects are more than ever relevant and efforts in implementing the Green Initiative for Tajikistan should be increased.

- <u>Creating new employment opportunities:</u> There is a need to continue work on reforms at the macro level and on providing social safety nets while working on improving the business environment. Efforts should be put on reducing costs of establishing small and medium size businesses and free trade zones could be a solution among others.

- <u>Women empowerment:</u> As more women are involved in income-generating activities there is a need for stronger focus on involvement of women in the current reforms and anti-crisis plan.