

# EXECUTIVE BRIEF: YEMEN

## Comprehensive Food Security Survey (CFSS) 2009/10

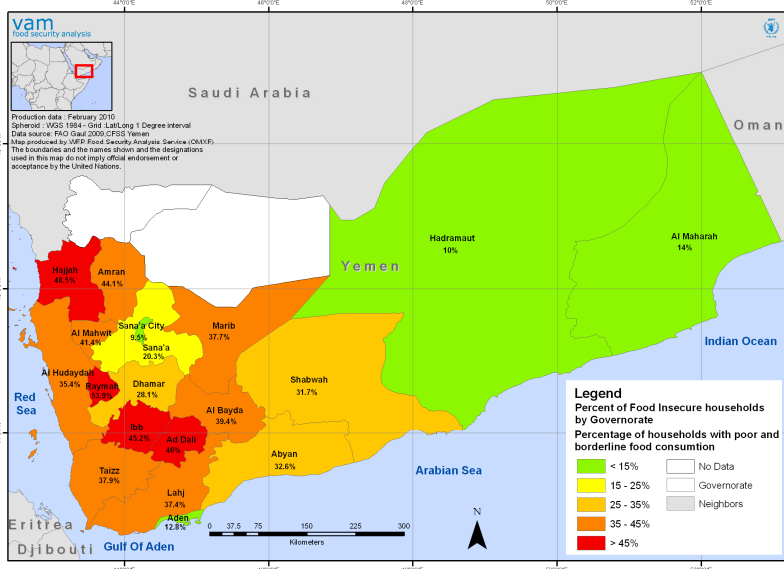
### Overview, Scope and Methods

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and the poorest country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The 2009 Human Development Index ranks the country 140th out of 182 countries. With an average national income per capita of US\$ 950, Yemen is a low income country. Nearly half of the population lives on less than two dollars a day and social development indicators, such as child malnutrition, maternal mortality and education attainment remain extremely poor.

The substantial rise in food prices over the past two years has significantly increased the number of Yemenis that are affected by food insecurity and poverty. Food availability and access to food is influenced by international market price volatilities – for oil that creates most of government’s revenue, and for food that needs to be imported.

Yemen is confronted with a number of challenges that negatively impact on the populations’ overall well-being, including complex political crisis in several parts of the country, recurrent droughts and floods and the increased influx of refugees from the Horn of Africa and other countries and Internally Displaced Persons in the north, all of which affecting the food security and nutritional status of the population, amongst others.

WFP carried out a nationwide comprehensive food security survey (CFSS) between September 2009 and January 2010<sup>1</sup> with the aim to guide WFP’s future interventions in 2010/11, inform Yemen’s Humanitarian Response Plan 2010 and provide a potential basis for improved geographic and socio-economic targeting of the most food-insecure persons.



### How many people are food-insecure?

About **6.8 million Yemenis** (31.5 percent) **are food-insecure**<sup>2</sup>. Within this group, **2.5 million people** (11.8 percent) were found **to be severely food-insecure**. Recent simulation analyses conducted by IFPRI (2010) to assess the impact of the high food and fuel prices, confirm the alarming prevalence of food insecurity in Yemen, with one in three Yemenis having difficulties accessing sufficient and nutritious food.

Yemen is also one of the countries with the **highest rates of malnutrition in the world**, with 13.2 percent of children between 6 to 59 months are wasted and 55.7 percent stunted.<sup>3</sup>

Percent of food insecure households at governorate level (Source: CFSS 2010)

According to the CFSS and on the basis of the mid-upper-arm-circumference (MUAC) method, 9.2 percent of children between 12 to 59 months are acutely malnourished with the highest burden among children below 2 years<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Of Yemen’s 21 governorates, two (Saada, Al Jawf) could not be covered because of security concerns and are therefore not included in the analysis.

<sup>2</sup> The actual number of food-insecure Yemenis as determined by the CFSS is based on 2010 population estimates. If an average prevalence were to be applied for those two governorates, the overall number of food-insecure people in Yemen would add to 7.2 million.

<sup>3</sup> Household Budget Survey, 2005/06.

<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of acute child malnutrition cannot be compared to previous findings due to the different methods used and the different age ranges used for anthropometric measurements (6-59 months) and MUAC (12-59 months).

## Where are the food-insecure people?

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Food insecurity is not distributed evenly in the country and large regional differences exist. Rural areas are more affected with double the share of food-insecure people of urban areas. Fourteen out of nineteen governorates in Yemen have more than one quarter of their population affected by food insecurity<sup>5</sup>. Among those, five governorates host 61 percent of all food-insecure and 66 percent of severely food-insecure people in the country<sup>6</sup>. The severe food-insecure population is concentrated in Rayma, Amran, Ad Dahle and Ibb with more than one in five people affected in each.

## Who are the food-insecure people?

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More than half of all food-insecure households (52.2 percent) are engaged in making a living from the following livelihoods: **Wage labour** (agricultural & non-agricultural), **crop and livestock production, reliance on the receipt of in-country remittances, family support and social benefits and livestock trading.**

Common denominators of these livelihoods are uncertainty and un-sustainability: reliance on family support and social benefits implies lack of control over the quantity and the frequency of informal support, while the formal sources may not be sufficient. Agro-pastoral livelihoods are exposed to low production, animal and plant diseases, uncertain weather and changing climatic conditions, as well as increasingly difficult access to water supplies. Wage labour, whether agricultural or non-agricultural, generally involves temporary employment and seasonal migration, increasing the number of households relying on remittances.

Additional characteristics that food-insecure households have in common include **high rates of dependents**, such as young and old household members not contributing to the households' overall income due to their age. Furthermore, food-insecure households are more likely to be headed by individuals who received very **limited formal education** or **who are illiterate** and who themselves are less likely to send their own children to school compared to food-secure households, especially as the (female) children grow older. This is also due to the fact that they tend to **live further away from the nearest primary and secondary schools**. Food-insecure households engage in **fewer income activities** which makes them more vulnerable to potential future shocks, natural or man-made, as the level of vulnerability depends on households' ability to alternate between the different incomes sources that are at their disposal. Rural food-insecure households mainly **grow cereals in limited quantities and qat**, predominately **relying on rainwater for cultivation**. While using **markets as the main source for accessing food**, they appear to live further walking distances away from them than food-secure households. They purchase their food on a less regular basis and tend to make use of **informal credit sources** such as family and friends, shopkeepers and/or moneylenders. Their **largest share of monthly expenditures is spent on bread, followed by health expenses and qat**. The **quality of their diet is poor**, they are more likely to resort to food-related coping strategies in times when food access is limited and they are more likely to be challenged by **malnutrition in women and children** than their food-secure counterparts. Food-insecure households indicated to have been challenged mostly by **high food prices, lack of rainfall and lack of drinking water** in 2009. They generally consider their own **economic standing and well-being to have worsened** substantially over the year preceding the survey.

## Why are they food-insecure?

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**Poverty:** Following the rise in food and fuel prices since 2006, the country's poverty incidence has increased by 8 percentage points (IFPRI 2010), leaving 42.8 percent of the population with insufficient resources to access enough nutritious food and invest in their livelihoods and personal development and the development of their children. The CFSS found that the food security status of a household is significantly associated with its socio-economic standing in society, i.e. the poorer the household the more likely for it to be food-insecure. Also, poor households were found to be more likely to reduce the number of meals eaten during the day or consume less expensive or less preferred foods, which in turn increases their vulnerability to becoming food-insecure.

**Exposure to market price volatilities:** The country's food availability is mainly ensured by commercial imports, making the country highly vulnerable to international market price volatilities

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<sup>5</sup> > 30% of population : Rayma, Ibb, Hajja, Ad-Daleh, Amran, Al-Bayda, Taiz and Lahej; > 25% of population: Marib, Al-Hodeidah, Al-Mahweet and Shabwa.

<sup>6</sup> Ibb, Taiz, Hajja, Hodeidah and Amran.

transmitting down to the local level as witnessed in 2007/08 with wheat price increases of 88 percent (WFP 2008). Given that 96 percent of Yemenis are net-buyers (IFPRI 2010), high food prices are one of the determining factors of household food insecurity in Yemen. Although food prices have decreased since their peak in 2008, they remain at pre-crises levels.

**Limited sustainable investments in rural infrastructure and livelihoods:** Agriculture provides an income for approximately 80 percent of the population (HBS 2005/06), yet the sector remains highly underdeveloped. Crop yields remain below potential compared to levels of other countries with similar environmental conditions (CFSAM 2009), access to efficient irrigation techniques is greatly limited and post harvest losses are high due to poor harvesting, handling, packaging, transport and storage systems. Qat, the most commonly cultivated cash crop, is using 40 percent of Yemen's water resources, leaving increasingly insufficient quantities for food crops and for drinking water. Although markets are the main sources of food for almost the entire population, they are significantly more difficult to access in rural areas, in some disadvantaged governorates and for the poorer segments of society. All of the above constraints and limitations have been found to negatively impact the food security status of the rural population.

**Limited investment in human development, especially for women:** As in most parts of the world, there is a very strong link in Yemen between the educational level of the household head and his spouse and the household's food security status. A good educational status among all, both men and women, results in a significant improvement of their food security status. However, educational levels in Yemen remain considerably low, with illiteracy rates reaching 45.9 percent at the national level, 26.9 percent among men and 65.3 percent among women<sup>7</sup>. The rural/urban divide is bigger than ever with 80.5 percent of all households with illiterate heads residing in the country-side. The CFSS found more than half of all food-insecure households to be headed by illiterate household heads, compared to one in three food-secure households. Additionally, the educational background of their mothers directly relates to the malnutrition status of her children. Food-insecure households were found to be less inclined to send their girls to school.

**Population growth at macro level and high number of dependents at micro level:** Yemen's population growth at 3 percent per year is one of the fastest in the world and is seriously impacting on the country's already limited natural resources and contributing to a stagnating unemployment rate of 15 percent<sup>8</sup>. Yemen has an average of 5.4 children born per women, one of the highest fertility rates in the world<sup>9</sup>. At micro level, a determining factor of food insecurity is the number of dependents, i.e. young and old family members not contributing to the household's income: the higher the number of dependents, the more likely the household was found to be affected by food insecurity.

**Health Environment:** The use of unsafe drinking water and sanitation facilities<sup>10</sup> in Yemen heightens the likelihood of having malnourished children and women in the household. Access to safe drinking water appears to have worsened since 2006, particularly in rural areas. While the situation in the urban areas has improved quite substantially, more than half of the rural population is still drinking water from unsafe sources, facing increased risks of having malnourished household members. The greatly limited access to both, safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities particularly in rural areas, are factors explaining the elevated prevalence of malnutrition in Yemen. Access to health facilities is also greatly limited in rural areas, which was found to be a determining factor of both the food security status of the household and the nutritional well-being of its women and children.

### **Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition – a vicious circle**

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Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are closely intertwined, with changes in one likely to impact the others, particularly in rural locations. While economically poor Yemenis are not food-insecure and challenged by malnutrition by default, the likelihood for them to be confronted by food insecurity and malnutrition is considerably higher than it is for better off Yemenis.

Poverty has been on the rise since 2006 when food and fuel prices started to increase and the global financial crisis - together known as the "Triple F" crisis - negatively affected the country. Given the

<sup>7</sup> Central Statistics Organization, Statistical Yearbook 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> UNCTAD, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the UNICEF definition of improved and unimproved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities, except for bottled water which the CFSS team classified as improved. See [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/monitoring/oms\\_brochure\\_core\\_questionsfinal24608.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/oms_brochure_core_questionsfinal24608.pdf) (page 16).

strong and positive link between poverty and food insecurity, the number of Yemenis having difficulties accessing sufficient, safe and nutritious food can be assumed to have increased in tandem. And those Yemenis who are seriously challenged by poverty and still manage to eat acceptable diets, are nevertheless at considerable risk of becoming food-insecure as a consequence of minor food price increase, not to mention as a result of a bigger shock, be it natural or the result of human action.

While poverty reflects a chronic, long-term household status, food insecurity and malnutrition can be temporary, challenging the household at specific times during the course of the year when agricultural produce is low and food prices are high or in response to a shock. Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition tend to exacerbate each other but their linkage provides a number of entry points that, when addressed, can break the vicious circle.

### **Recommendations for interventions**

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Two workshops took place with key stakeholders/partners in January 2010<sup>11</sup> to discuss potential responses that best attend to the plight of over 6.8 million Yemenis as laid out by the CFSS findings and confirmed by IFPRI's macro-econometric analyses.

The medium- to long-term response recommendations are not WFP-specific and will be further refined following IFPRI's development of operational priorities for the five key sectors<sup>12</sup> that have been identified to be most relevant in the endeavour to achieve food security in Yemen.

#### **Medium- to long-term interventions:**

- Promotion of girls education, especially in rural areas and beyond primary school;
- Improvement of access to clean water and sanitation, including massive awareness campaigns;
- Implementation of nutrition training for mothers on care, feeding practices, family planning, etc.
- Provision of employment opportunities and income-diversification to increase people's economic access to food in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector;
- Provision of loans and credit to help people access productive assets, both agricultural and non-agricultural;
- Augmentation of food availability at household and community level in rural areas through own production, by addressing the stagnating productivity growth of cereals, horticultural crops and livestock, by providing access to improved, economically viable water management and irrigation techniques and by improving storage and conservation facilities, in particular in the horticultural sector;
- Establishment of a food security monitoring system, including a nutrition surveillance and market price monitoring system, etc.

The short-term response options, on the other hand, are tailored to WFP's mandate and are in line with those that were initially recommended during WFP's workshop with key partners in August 2009 but which have been refined on the basis of the updated primary data provided by the CFSS.

#### **Short-term interventions:**

- Reduction of acute malnutrition to below emergency levels through therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes for children aged 6-59 months;
- Prevention of acute malnutrition to below emergency levels through blanket and targeted supplementary feeding programmes for children below two years and malnourished pregnant and lactating women respectively, to break the intra-generational cycle of malnutrition;
- Provision of food-based safety nets for the poorest and most food-insecure households in rural and urban areas, complementing the Social Welfare Fund's cash transfer and other existing safety nets.

### **For more information on the CFSS, please contact:**

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The full report is posted on <http://www.wfp.org/food-security>

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<sup>11</sup> 13 January 2010 (WFP with Cooperating Partners); 17 January 2010 (IFPRI/WFP with Food Security Committee)

<sup>12</sup> Agriculture and water, markets and trade, nutrition, health and education sector.