Tajikistan Food Security Monitoring System

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. The exact methodology is contained in annexes.

HIGHLIGHTS
- **Moderate and severe insecurity** slightly worsened since last round at about 25% and 10% respectively. The relative stability of food security is due to lasting stocks of wheat from the last harvest, assistance provided to households by relatives, as well as to more credit (and debts) and other coping strategies which may nevertheless negatively affecting the households’ conditions in the long run.
- **The lack of improvement** of moderate and severe food insecurity is due to the seasonal decrease of job opportunities, fewer remittances sent before the winter, continued food price increase and higher expenditures, notably due to the contributions to the Roghun dam.
- **The outlook for the next three months is mainly dependent** on three factors: weather, relation with Uzbekistan and remittances. Indicators show that the harvest should be as good as last year due to good precipitations but still highly dependent on the weather, access to quality seeds and credit to farmers for fertilizers and pesticides. Natural disaster might also reduce productivity in localized areas. Migration will also depend on the situation in Moscow following new regulations for immigration (immigration permits) and lower levels of salaries for migrants. Finally, if the road and railways blockade at the Uzbek border is maintained, access to food, fuel and fertilizers for wheat and cotton will be reduced and have an impact on prices and food security as a whole in the middle of the lean season.

Special Focus
Over the next four months, special attention should be paid to the following to remote areas prone to shocks: Sughd – Asht and B. Gafurov districts, Khatlon – 5 of the 6 zones monitored show high levels of food insecurity (map below), GBAO – the situation in Murghab is of concern due to heavy snowfall and increasingly difficult access and DRD – Jirgatol, Rasht and Tadjikobod.
Overview of the overall household food security by indicators

The levels of food insecurity slightly deteriorate compared to the previous round, with 10% of the households interviewed being classified as severely food insecure and 25% moderately food insecure. Moderate food insecurity has slightly increased since last round (from 20% to 25%). Areas of the country with the highest levels of food insecurity also remain the same.

Demographics of the households interviewed

Households interviewed have 7 members in average with only 13% of the households having less than 5 members. Almost 1/4th are female-headed households. Most children attended school in the past three months. Those who did not attend school reported that the costs of education were the main obstacle to education. 10% of the households interviewed had at least one out-migrant in the past three months which is very similar to last rounds (Isfara was the highest with 1.8 members per household - average for the sample is 0.2).

Shocks

Over the winter, the main shocks have remained the high food prices and poor quality and quantity of drinking water. Loss of income and employment and bankruptcy of business are other severe shocks affecting households’ access to food and livelihood. Seasonal shocks (severe cold and late frosts impacting agriculture) are also noted as similar to the previous year during the same period. Like last winter, elevated incidence of human diseases is also among the main shocks. Shocks linked to water and prices are qualified by household as chronic.

As much as 46% of the households interviewed report not recovering at all from shocks. This is a witness to the poor capacity to cope by households all over the country. More households report not having recovered from shocks than over the past two rounds. According to key informants, 60% of the communities are facing more problems than last year at the same period especially price rise and unemployment (same as the last round). Higher unemployment seems to still be due to the global economic crisis, low salaries and incentives and to the lack of opportunities for more permanent jobs. Farmers confirmed that the lack of irrigation and debts for agricultural production (water, inputs and taxes) are major constraints for many communities.

The main loss of jobs reported is in the agriculture sector (55% of the communities’ members lost their jobs in the past three months).

This is also the start of the disasters’ season and several disasters were recorded in the past weeks (Tojikobod, Vanj, Vose, Temurmalik) and are still ongoing. Coping strategies, assistance and assets

To respond to chronic and seasonal problems and in order to try to maintain an acceptable food security, households engage in daily wage labor, take credit to cope and engage in husbandry or seek any other alternative employment. In addition, households adopt negative coping strategies linked to food: relying on less expensive but less nutritious foods, purchase food on credit and limiting the number of meals per day.

The coping strategy index (taking into account the frequency of use of the most harmful coping mechanisms) seems at its highest since May 09. This could be due to the winter season that forces households to multiply the use of harmful coping strategies combined with high prices and recession.

Some households can count on their own assets to mitigate the impacts of shocks but, overall, households do not own many assets. Only 28% of the households report owning a vehicle and 14% a fridge. Only cell phones and cooking stoves are widely owned (64%).

Assistance received

In the past three months, school feeding, benefiting 24% of the households interviewed and free foods from relatives (10% of the households) constitute the main supports. Some localized assistance is to be noted as well: support to pregnant and lactating women in Temurmalik and Muminobod areas, free food rations from international organizations in Qumsangir, Vanj, Khuroson, Ghonchi and Aini, cash assistance in Khuroson and Isfara, and micro-credit in Asht. More households have received free food from relatives than in previous rounds (5% last round and last winter).
Migration
Migration trends are similar to previous rounds (66% of the households have migrants). Most still migrate to Russia but a high percentage migrates now internally to the capital or region centers showing that more Tajiks try to find a job locally because of reduced salaries in Russia. 80% of families did not receive remittances in the past three months and 70% report receiving fewer remittances. No household reported receiving more in the past three months than in previous rounds. Among the households receiving remittances in the past three months (132 out of 665), 74% declared that remittances represented more than 50% of their total income. Very few households reported returning migrants (8%). This is deemed normal for 76% of them as migrants normally return before the winter. Nonetheless, 14% of the households reported that migrants returned without money compared with 33% in the last round that returned without money.

More general assessments by key informants indicate that the number of households receiving remittances is actually higher than indicated by data from the household survey. It also shows that this round again, remittances are mostly used for purchasing food (82%).

Several reports point towards an increase of remittances inflow at the national level since the beginning of the year. But this increase has been undermined by new taxes and expenditures households face (see below).

The main source of water remains public tap for 34% of the households and pond and rivers for 27%. Cooking fuels over the winter were mainly firewood (49%) and cow dung (34%). Compared to last year, there were fewer problems with heating over the winter and difficulties were mainly linked to the availability and costs of firewood and coal. Similarly, electricity cuts were an issue for only 24% of the households compared to 49% in January last year. Therefore, electricity became the main source of lighting this year (54%) while candles represent 21% (decreased from 49% last year in January).

Agriculture
The main constraints with wheat cultivation revolve around the same three main issues: lack of land (20%), lack of irrigation water (18%) and lack of seeds or seedlings (10%). For potatoes, the main constraints are the lack of seeds (24%) and the lack of irrigation (22%). For vegetables, the lack of irrigation is the main issue.

Spring sowing season has started and an equivalent surface will be planted with wheat again this year. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, this year (2009-2010) winter wheat has been sown on 220,000 ha. Spring wheat should be planted on 186,000 ha. In total, 406,000 ha will be allocated for wheat this year compared to 355,000 ha last year. Cotton sowing also started in March, it will be planted on 183,000 hectares (14,000 ha more than last year).

In some parts of Sughd though, up to 30% of the winter sowing of wheat has been damaged by winter snowfalls. Locusts’ outbreak has also started in some Southern districts of the country (Jiliqul, Vakhsh, Khuroson, Dangara, Temurmalik).

According to key informants, there has been no significant change in agriculture practices in the field. Two-thirds to 80% of the communities plant wheat, out of which 23% report having planting more and 32% planted less than last year. Farmers confirmed the constraints with agriculture reported by households: problems with irrigation, lack of acreage, machinery and seeds. The main problems with irrigation are the distance to water source, the lack of water source and lack of maintenance. Regarding livestock, most of the householded owned animals at the time of the survey: 81% own cattle, 56% sheep/goat, 54% poultry, and 43% horse/donkey. 14% of livestock owners report losses over the winter due to diseases and cold weather. No major change has been observed in the percentage of households owning or losing livestock over time. The reasons for losses are mostly linked to diseases and cold weather. The quality of the pasture was deemed medium to good. The weather forecast for the coming months should allow for good and affordable fodder like last year. Regarding the health of the livestock in the past three months, most livestock was report in good health. Most livestock sold at the local market.

Expenditures
63% of households’ expenditures go to food (same as last round and 66% in January last year) and 7% goes to health. 20% of the households report increased expenditures such as Roghun (see below). Another 23% report changes due to unemployment. 16% still cite the economic crisis as a main factor in the change of expenditures. Three fourth of the respondents report that the distribution of expenditures per sector has changed: 63% because of food prices, 16% because of Roghun and 13% for health reasons. Most of the households consider these changes in expenditures to be unusual for the season (78%).

Expenditures on food have decreased due to the decline of some prices since May 2009 but have increased again this round due to seasonal factors (higher cost of products and transportation as distance to the market is increased or villages are cut off from markets because of snow).

Inflation of food prices and increase of the CPI (5.5% in February) reveal a greater pressure on households’ tight budget. Overall, 55% of the interviewees report their economic situation to be worse than last year.

### Credit and debts

57% of the households took new debts in the past three months (46% last round). Main reasons for contracting debts remain buying food (69%), buying feed and fodder for animals (14%) and acquiring animals (6%). Time for reimbursement of the debts is minimum 7 weeks for two-thirds of the households. Although over time the main reasons for debts have constantly been to buy food and livestock, it was the case for only 50% of the households in 2008 while for 2009 and this round they were mentioned by more than two-thirds of the households interviewed. There is also an increase in the percentage of households contracting new debts since the beginning of 2009.

### Income sources and food Access Score

Over the past three months, respondents’ main income sources were government job (18% of the households interviewed), remittances (17%), daily wage labor (15%), field crops (11%), pension (9%), livestock (8%) and borrowing/begging (6%). The second main sources of income are pensions (28%), government job (15%) and borrowing/begging (10%). Begging is this round the third most important second source of income together with government. 95% of households have one or two income sources and 5% have three or more income sources (90% last round and last year) because of fewer job opportunities in winter time especially for seasonal daily work. This explains the decrease of daily wage labor as a main income source. Key informants noted that the past months have seen a decrease of daily wage rates because of the crisis and the lack of work opportunities at this season despite abundant manpower (returned migrants).
Food sources, food stocks and markets
As in the previous winter round, the main source for food over the past seven days is the central market (at other times of the year the local market is the main source). Half of the households report the local market as their usual source. This points out like last year towards a HARDER PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY OF CERTAIN FOODS IN WINTER AS HOUSEHOLDS NEED TO GO TO FURTHER-AWAY MARKETS. 73% of the households reported central and local markets as a main source (similar as January last year but 10 points more than in October due to reduced access to own production).

Food consumption
The diet of most households remains poor and not diversified, with meat, fruits and beans rarely eaten more than once a week. The most food insecure households lack meat, milk, fruits and beans (eaten very rarely); their consumption relies mostly on cereals, oil/fats and sugar. The total number of meals eaten the day before was much lower than in October (2 per day in average for adults and 3 for children) and much less than last year in January. The overall food consumption score is lower than the previous round (46 against 50) and than last year (53).

Regarding food stocks, trends show that more households report food coming from their home production. These might be remaining stocks from the good harvest last year. 90% of the households declare having food stocks (91% last year and 88% last round). The 10% who do not have food stocks are concentrated in 5 zones (Khuroson, Murghab, Isfara, Turunzoda and Fayzobod).

81% of the households report not having been able to build sufficient stocks for the early spring (only Vanj, Teurmalik and Isfara have managed). Most food stocks come from own production (78%). The main reason for not being able to build enough stocks is the lack of income (80%). No food stock reported comes from food aid.

Most shop keepers sell at credit (86%) and 65% mentioned that more households are asking for credit (against 40% in the past round). Shop owners noted a decrease in sales over the past three months mainly due to an increase of prices. The latter is due to the increase of prices of suppliers, taxes and transportation costs. Shop owners also reported that the main constraints with their business as a whole are the cost of transport and the lack of funds and credit.

The closure of the Uzbek border has also affected the supply on some markets (especially in Khatlon and Sughd provinces) and prevents households from having physical and financial access (increase of prices in the market) to food over the past month or so. This is because the closure has also prevented business from regions close to the border and restricted usual trade therefore forcing households into migration, unemployment or debts. Finally the retention of fuel cargo at a time of sowing might affect the coming harvest in Tajikistan and delays in sowing will affect future yields.
Health
There is an increase in the number of cases of cold and flu for the season according to the medical staff interviewed. An increase in blood pressure and anemia was also mentioned as well. Swine flu (H1N1) did not propagate according to the worst case scenario notably thanks to the long closure of schools. Illnesses in children that are associated with poor water quality have also been identified as a main concern for the past weeks and for the coming months.

Causes of household food security over the past three months
The results of this round confirm that food insecure households generally do not possess assets such as car (only 18%), satellite dish (1%), phone (58%) or sewing machine (24%). It also reveals that food insecure households use more often negative coping strategies such as relying on less preferred and less expensive foods which are also less nutritious (54% report it happens a lot), limiting the portion size of the meals (15% a lot), reducing the number of meals eaten in a day (6% a lot), and all sort of decreases in expenditures (health, agriculture...) than food secure households.

Food insecure households also are often in debts (two third will need more than 7 weeks to pay back their credit). On the other hand, severely food insecure households seem to rely more remittances than food secure households. The fact that they might receive less substantial amounts, less frequently combine with a lack of diverse income make food insecure households receiving remittances more vulnerable to food insecurity. The survey also confirms that severely food insecure households are smaller in size (6 members) than food-secure households (7.5 members). Smaller households normally have fewer expenses. Larger households should receive more income but the lack of opportunities limits this option.

Households engaging in certain livelihoods seem more prone to food insecurity than others. For example, households living off livestock products, skilled labor, government salaries, small businesses and remittances are normally better off than households whose main income is daily wage labor (two third are food insecure) and begging and borrowing (none are food secure). This is because the latter types of income are less stable and providing lower earnings than the others.

Severely food insecure households report having been better targeted by assistance than others: 19% of the severely food insecure households report having received free food rations from their relatives (against 7% of food secure), 13% report receiving food for work and 16% received microcredit. This would seem to reflect relatively efficient kinship and social support mechanisms.

Possible scenarios and recommendations
- **Agriculture:** although the forecast for the wheat, fruits and potato harvests looks good, most of the coming campaign will again depend on favorable weather conditions and if farmers had access to quality seeds and credit for fertilizers and pesticides. Weather forecast predicts that rainfall will be above average more or less all over the main production areas. But localized areas have already been hit by several disasters (late frosts, excessive snowfall and locust outbreak) that might create pockets of low yield and low production contributing to food insecurity in the absence of sufficient income to purchase food. Livestock production should be on the levels of last year thanks to good fodder access but is chronically limited by diseases and lack of veterinary services.

**Recommendation:** on top of the initiatives already ongoing, the building and/or rebuilding of irrigation systems, provision of quality seeds and access to long term low interest credit for farmers are needed to ensure better and more sustainable production.

- **Prices:** Fuel prices should increase in the next few months due to the coming harvest and to the closure of the border with Uzbekistan. Prices of most food usually continue to increase until the harvest in June in Tajikistan and abroad. But prices will remain high and probably the main constraint to households’ food access and thus food security. Although stocks lasted longer than last year due the previous good harvest and to lower prices of food last fall, in several parts of the country stocks are not going to last until the harvest period: households in Murghab, parts of the Rasht Valley and other remote areas will have to borrow more or reduce even further their consumption to cope with the situation. This can have serious impacts on health and nutritional status of children.
**Recommendation:** until the harvest is available, accompanied by decrease of prices and access to own production, the most vulnerable households should be assisted with income generation activities and food assistance.

**Expenditures:** Taxes are also increasing households’ expenditures. Contributions to the construction of Roghun were often cited as a main obstacle to a balanced households’ budget. It seems that households are still being asked to contribute further. If so, it will continue to affect food security of some households. In addition, taxes for agriculture and especially irrigation will further affect families living off agriculture production.

**Recommendation:** monitoring the second phase of contribution to the Roghun dam should be included in the next round. So far, the most food insecure households have not been asked to contribute.

**Disaster season:** the forecast of high level of precipitation is a two edge sword and could allow for good harvest of wheat and other crops but might damage the recent sowing and force farmers to sow again. Moreover, several regions have already experienced natural disasters (floods, mudflows, locusts). The exceptional high snow fall in mountainous areas will further increase the risk of disaster.

**Recommendation:** Coordination of responses to disaster and preparedness for the coming season has already been initiated, especially at the regional and local level. Review of available stocks and funds has also been initiated by each cluster with OCHA’s support. Large scale reforestation projects and monitoring of snow melt are advisable.

**Income and remittances:** it is still not certain if households will decide on migrating in mass like last year. The recent terrorist attacks in Moscow, the decline of income in the Russian Federation (average salary is reported to have decreased by half) and the new regulations for migration will probably discourage some migrants from travelling. Results also show that migrants are also looking more for local jobs. The decrease in the daily wage labor rates and opportunities in the past three months will come to an end with the beginning of the agricultural season that should provide for more seasonal jobs.

**Recommendation:** income generation and employment schemes by the government and partners are needed to provide households with stable and long term job opportunities. Food insecurity in Tajikistan is closely linked to this chronic issue.

**Health and nutrition:** the coming months are normally of concern for children nutrition due to the reduced food consumption in the winter combined with the poor quality of water and increased diarrhea in the summer. The next FSMS will monitor the nutritional status of some household members to assess the situation. The National Nutrition Survey of October last year pointed towards some improvements but chronic issues remain and stunting is still high due to lack of access to food feeding practices, poor hygiene and lack of micronutrients.

**Recommendation:** Monitor the situation in the summer and provide support to malnourished families. Nutrition education and support to enriching local production are needed.

**Food consumption** should increase after the harvest but is expected to remain low and poorly diversified in the coming two months. This improvement should help mitigate the effects of the lean season but will be highly dependent on household’s ability to financially access food.

**Recommendation:** same recommendations as for “Income”.

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Previous reports on food security can be found on www.wfp.org/food security and www.untj.org/library or by contacting WFP in Tajikistan.

Views expressed hereby are those of the author only.
School Feeding in Tajikistan

The WFP School Feeding programme is designed to support children's access to education and to improve girls' high school completion rates in rural Tajikistan. WFP's School Feeding programme in Tajikistan began in 1999, initially reaching 5,000 schoolchildren in the northern Sughd region. Today, WFP feeds approximately 360,000 primary school children and staff in around 2,000 schools. These figures represent approximately 60 percent of children in Grades 1 to 4 in rural, food-insecure regions.

Every day they are in school, the children are served a hot meal consisting of a soup made with beans, enriched cooking oil, iodized salt and, usually, vegetables provided by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). The soup is accompanied by traditional bread baked with WFP fortified wheat flour.

Studies show that improving nutrition can help increase students' attention span and alertness, and enhance their opportunities for personal development, which can in turn help reduce poverty for their family, community and country. Just 14 U.S. cents a day will provide each child with a hot nutritious meal -- a small investment when considering the significant long-term benefits of a better educated population.

With an average of two children per family benefiting from WFP's School Feeding, families save up to U.S. $25 per year per child or around 10 percent of households’ food expenditures. School Feeding not only contributes to children's...