



## Executive Brief:

# The Gambia - Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) 2011

## Overview, scope and methods

The Gambia is the **smallest country in continental Africa** (11,295 sq km) with an estimated **1.7 million inhabitants** and an annual population growth rate of 2.7 percent. The climate is Sudano-Sahelian (semi-arid) with an average annual rainfall of about 860 mm. Main climatic shocks include heavy rainfalls and flash floods during the rainy season (June – October).

The Gambia is classified as a Least Developed, Low Income Food Deficit Country, currently **ranked 151st out of 169 countries according to the 2010 Human Development Index**. Approximately **53 percent of the population are living below the US\$2 per day poverty line**. The economy is relatively undiversified with economic growth averaging 5-6 percent in 2004-2009. Foreign exchange earnings are based primarily on groundnut exports, tourism and remittances.

**Domestic cereal production**, particularly in the form of subsistence agriculture, **accounts for only up to 60 percent of annual consumption** requirements by the majority of the population. In addition, **weak purchasing power and a heavy reliance on food imports** make The Gambia's population highly vulnerable to external shocks (price fluctuations), primarily to the detriment of food security and poverty levels.

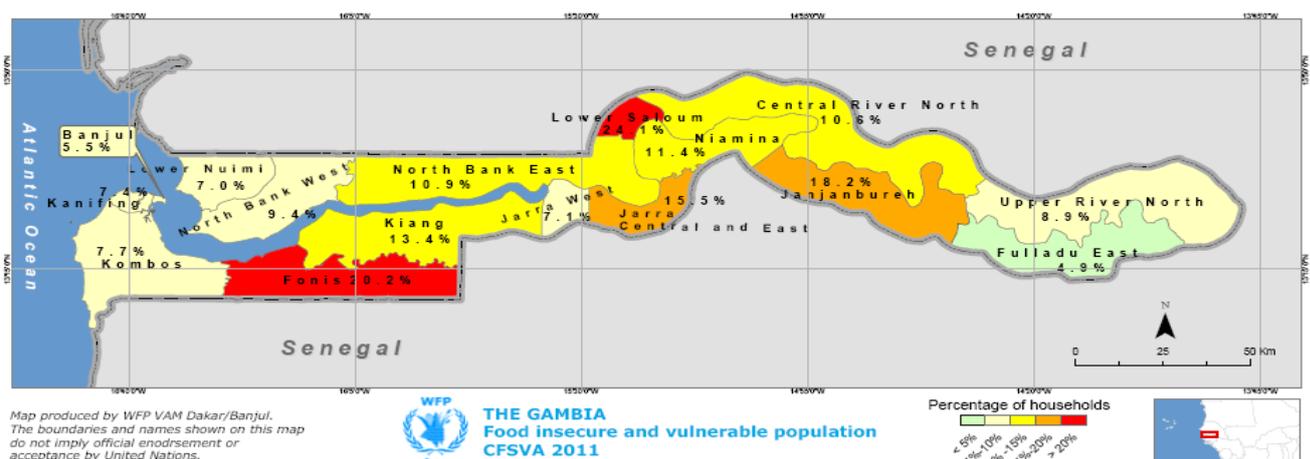
**How was the analysis done?** The Gambia CFSVA 2011 was conducted jointly with The Gambia Bureau of Statistics, Department of Agriculture, National Nutrition Agency, National Disaster Management Agency, Department of Water Resources, Concern Universal, Gambia Red Cross Society, Action Aid The Gambia, US Peace Corps, FAO, UNICEF and UNFPA. Data collection was undertaken in the period of 16 – 26 January 2011, a time of the year when food is generally more available and when there are less access constraints at household level. For the purpose of the analysis administrative units in The Gambia were regrouped into **16 territorial strata** with a total of **2,592 households** being interviewed from 336 communities countrywide, in urban and rural areas. Information was obtained through primary data collection at household level, focus group discussions at eight randomly selected communities and secondary data analysis.

## How many people are food insecure or vulnerable and where are they located?

The **food insecure groups** are those defined as currently having poor food consumption and insufficient food access, whereas the **vulnerable groups** may or may not currently have poor food consumption but have nevertheless insufficient food access and are therefore most likely to become food insecure in the event of a shock or a crisis

At the national level about **145,119 people are considered food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity (11 percent of total population)**, 140,018 were considered vulnerable while 5,101 were identified as food insecure at the time of data collection. There is notable variation across the country with a significantly higher proportion of food insecure or vulnerable population found in **Lower Saloum (24 percent)**, **Fonis (20 percent)**, and **Janjanbureh (18 percent)** strata where there are sizable urban settlements.

Map: Proportion of food insecure or vulnerable households at strata level



The **under-5 mortality rate in The Gambia is 103 per 1,000** live births compared to the world average of 60. According to the 2009 UNICEF under-5 mortality rankings this places the country 31st out of the 194 countries with the highest mortality rate.

At national level, **6 percent of children under 5 are wasted** (too thin for their height, an indication of acute malnutrition) and **22 percent of them are stunted** (too short for their age, an indication of chronic malnutrition). Additionally, 19.9 percent of infants have low birth weights and 20.3 percent of children under 5 are underweight. This situation is attributable to inappropriate child feeding practices, particularly to an early end to breastfeeding and inadequate complementary feeding during and after weaning

Especially worrying is the incidence of **poverty** across the vast majority of the population. Widespread poverty is strongly associated with household vulnerability to food insecurity.

### **Who are the food insecure and vulnerable people?**

Livelihoods were clustered into 6 main groups based on their primary source of income (i.e between 60 and 85 percent of the total income). These included cash crop growing, self employment, salaries, remittances, non agricultural wages and food crop growing. Cash crop growing was observed by 36 percent of the population as the primary productive activity, followed by self-employment (22 percent) and salaries (14 percent). The **highest incidence of food insecurity** and vulnerability was found among households whose primary livelihood sources are **non agricultural wages** (15 percent of the total population), the **production and sale of cash crops** (13 percent) and **self employment** (11 percent).

Households headed by women; those with illiterate household heads ; and those using unimproved sources of drinking water or sanitation facilities were more likely to be identified as food insecure.

### **What are the causes of food insecurity and vulnerability?**

The main causes of food insecurity are an **inefficient agricultural sector** and **widespread poverty**. Domestic agriculture is primarily characterised by **small holder farming** (70 percent of interviewed households produce food) **with low average yields** (1MT/ha) and **large post harvest losses** (up to 40 percent). Local production is highly seasonal and accounts for only up to 60 percent of annual consumption requirements of cereals, even though it has witnessed a slight increase in production levels over the past 2 years.

At the national level, food commodities (in particular rice) are generally available throughout the country and all year around due to commercial imports. The survey found that **physical access to markets does not seem to be an obstacle to food access** due to relatively good road connections and the availability of markets in relative close proximity to households. However, **access to food is largely conditioned by increasing and fluctuating food prices** given the **high average proportion of income being spent on food items (58 percent)** and **overall low purchasing power of an average Gambian household**.

At the time of the survey, nationally, 35 percent of households did not employ any food related coping strategies. However, the proportion of households employing food-related coping strategies is probably higher during the lean season. Relying on less preferred and cheaper foods and reducing portion sizes were mentioned as a main coping strategy by interviewed households.

### **How is the situation likely to evolve in the future?**

The 2011 CFSVA was conducted at a time when food is generally more available and when there are less access constraints at household level. It was undertaken at the end of the harvest, and income-generating opportunities were abundant as it was also the peak of the tourist season. As a consequence, the proportion of households who were found to be food insecure is relatively small. However, at least **one in ten households is vulnerable to food insecurity and this number will increase as the lean season approaches**.

Of particular concern will be the **impact of market related shocks** (such as food and fuel price increases, drop in tourism activity) on household vulnerability to food insecurity, due to a positive transmission effect from high global prices to domestic prices and the gradual erosion of households' purchasing power. In addition, sporadic climatic shocks (flash floods) will inevitably add to households' vulnerability levels.

## Recommendations for interventions

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Several broad strategic interventions are recommended for consideration by WFP and its partners.

- ✓ **Set up a food security monitoring system (FSMS)** at specific surveillance sites to track changes in household food security and vulnerability status over time, particularly observing the evolution of coping mechanisms, and the movement in food and fuel prices at key local markets and household purchasing power.
- ✓ Policies and interventions should be pursued that aim at **supporting livelihoods and removing structural bottlenecks that restrict household income** such as the limited storage and milling capacities at community and household level in rural areas; the high unemployment and low wages in urban areas; and the limited availability of affordable micro-credit institutions (especially in urban areas).
- ✓ Public sector **investments in understanding and tackling chronic malnutrition** should be increased to include data collection at a more disaggregated level (i.e. strata or districts), policy formulation and nationwide awareness - raising, and training events on nutrition and good care practices.
- ✓ There is a need to **set up a targeted social safety net** that can serve as a buffer for vulnerable households in times of crisis. This is particularly critical in the case of prolonged shocks with widespread negative impact on household income such as high food prices

*The full report is available at <http://www.wfp.org/food-security/reports/CFSVA>*

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