

**Joint Rapid Food Security Assessment  
of the most vulnerable areas in The Gambia  
3-7 October 2011**



**act:onaid**

*The assessment was conducted with the generous support by the European Union.*

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1. Context and objectives of the assessment .....	5
2. Methodology.....	6
3. Results.....	7
3.1 Food Availability.....	7
3.1.1 Agriculture.....	7
3.1.2 Markets .....	8
3.2 Food Access.....	8
3.2.1 Livelihoods and income sources .....	8
3.2.2 Expenditures .....	9
3.3. Food Utilization .....	12
3.3.1 Food consumption and coping.....	12
3.4 Cross-cutting issues.....	15
3.4.1 Demographic characteristics.....	15
3.4.2 Water, health and sanitation .....	16
3.4.3 Infrastructure and disaster preparedness .....	16
3.4.4 Credit.....	17
3.4.5 Assistance received and main priorities .....	17
4. Conclusion.....	17
5. Recommendations .....	18

## **Executive Summary**

The Rapid Food Security Assessment (RFSA) is a joint exercise of Department of Agriculture (Planning), GBOS, FAO, WFP and ActionAid aimed to follow up on the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA) which was conducted in January 2011, at times of relative abundance of food and income generating opportunities. As a follow up to the baseline study, the RFSA has been conducted in several most vulnerable areas as identified by the CFSVA and at a critical period in time during which most household's self-grown food stocks have been replenished and where income opportunities are scarce i.e. where vulnerability to food insecurity is assumed to be highest compared to the rest of the year. Although the results of the RFSA are not statistically significant due to the small sample size used, some conclusive statements can be made about household vulnerability to food insecurity when put into the overall context of the CFSVA.

### **FOOD AVAILABILITY**

For almost 70% of surveyed households a typical harvest during good climatic conditions will serve household consumption for 1 – 4 months only, with 5 months being the overall average. However, farming households were pessimistic about the agricultural outlook for the current season, indicating low and late rainfall, as well as intra-seasonal drought, as main shocks affecting their farming activities while it is expected that food produced will last for 2-3 months only, down from 5 months. Almost all communities surveyed reported that food availability in markets is worse with only few local cereals available in small quantities and generally less buyers visiting the lumos. Overall, there are growing concerns about the poor performance of upland crops including rice, early millet and groundnuts while food availability is expected to worsen earlier than usual, commencing with January – February 2012.

### **FOOD ACCESS**

Surveyed households rely mostly on the sale of food crop (67%), sale of cash crops (35%) and non-agricultural wage labor (19%) as their main income source. The proportion of households that reported an annual household income less than D20,000 is 65 percent, well above the national average (45 percent of households) level according to the CFSVA.

Households and communities surveyed unanimously reported that they are able to buy less than before with the same amount of income and attributed this mainly to rising food prices and cost of living. Prices for imported rice (100% broken) have risen by 16% compared to September 2010 and are only 2% below the price level recorded in September 2008 during the global food price crisis, with rice prices on the international market expected to rise further. Particularly affected by increasing food prices will be low income households spending a high proportion of income on food. Of the households interviewed, 75% recorded per capita expenditure for the month of September of below D1000 (33 USD), including 40% of households whose overall per capita expenditure was even below D 500 (17 USD), most of which were situated in the provinces.

While in January food expenditure accounts for 58% of total expenditure at the national level, by September, 75% of the surveyed households spent on average 62% of their income on food. In concrete terms, for three out of four households average per capita expenditure in September amounts to D445

(15 USD) of which average per capita expenditure on food is D267 (9 USD). Within that population most vulnerable seem to be 40% of households whose average per capita expenditure does not exceed D250 (8 USD) whilst per capita expenditure on food is only minimal at D 162 (5 USD) for that month. Of the food expenditure, the biggest share is allocated to rice with 34% (up from 29% in January). In the provinces more than a third of income that is envisaged for food is allocated to rice (37%) while that figure stands at 22% in Banjul and Kanifing based households.

## **FOOD UTILIZATION**

For all food items consumed in September except for coarse grains (most notably millet, sorghum and maize), the majority of households (58%) depended on food purchases rather than own production or other ways of sourcing. Almost 80% of households surveyed reported that August and September are the months most difficult in having enough food with 15% having poor or borderline food consumption<sup>1</sup> compared to approximately 3% back in January 2011. On average, 74% of surveyed households employed some type of food related coping strategies as opposed to 65% back in January. In particular, the proportion of households classified in the high coping category (i.e. employing more severe coping strategies) is 37 percent which is more than twice as much as the proportion of such households eight months ago when the CFSVA was conducted.

Overall, in the communities interviewed vulnerability to food insecurity seems to be higher at this period in time compared to the national average in January. The results of the survey point towards a trend where previously food secure and vulnerable households (approximately 12 percent) of the surveyed areas have been pushed into the food insecure category. In 2012, particularly vulnerable to food insecurity will be low income households and those which rely primarily on the sale of food and cash crops for their income due to the occurrence of two major external shocks: the steep rise of food prices and cost of living and the below normal rainfall negatively impacting the upcoming harvest, particularly for rice, early millet and groundnuts. For the vast majority of households the increase in food prices will not be favorable as they are net food buyers. On the other hand, food producers might not be able to profit from rising prices due to adverse climatic conditions affecting their overall output levels while in certain regions (NBR) farmers might be negatively affected by both due to lower agricultural output, greater input expenditures, lower income and a greater reliance on increasingly expensive staple foods.

In view of the negative developments more information needs to be collected on the potential drop in agricultural production, in particular the areas, crops and farmers most affected by the rainfall deficit. Monitoring of food prices and household food access should be intensified, in affected rural as well as vulnerable urban areas, and potential response options to rising food insecurity levels elaborated, including through cash and voucher mechanisms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Food consumption was determined using WFP's standard methodology (Food Consumption Score) which is based on dietary diversity (the number of food groups consumed by a household over a reference period of seven days), food frequency (the number of days each food group is consumed) and the relative nutritional importance of different groups. For details on the methodology, please refer to <http://www.wfp.org/content/gambia-comprehensive-food-security-and-vulnerability-analysis-2011>.

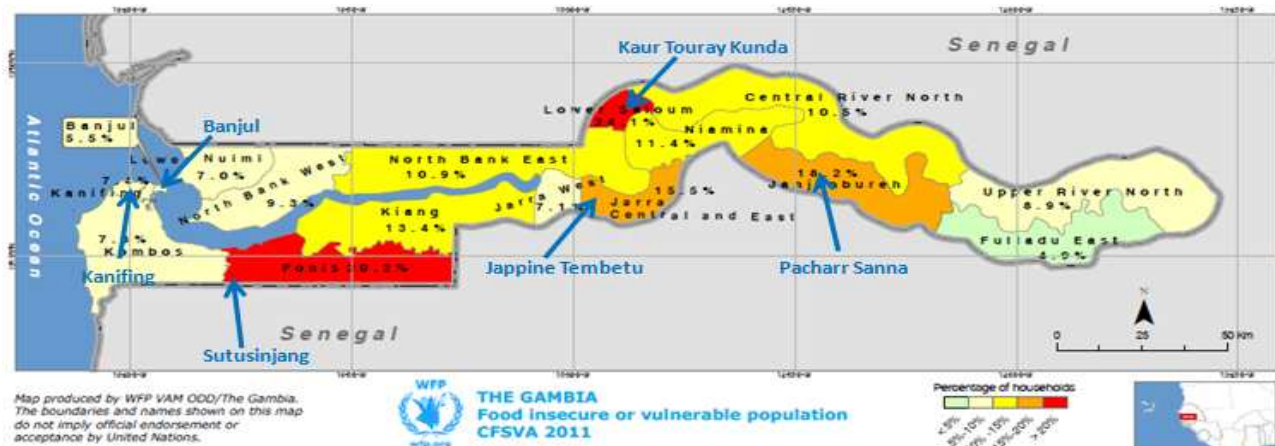
## 1. Context and objectives of the assessment

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 is 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 and weather anomalies), primarily to the detriment of food security and poverty levels.

In January 2011, WFP together with partners conducted a nationally representative baseline survey – the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) – to update the knowledge base on the food security and livelihoods situation at the household level in The Gambia taking into account the recent natural and economic shocks experienced by the population. The CFSVA found out that approximately 11 percent of the total population is food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity at a time of the year when food is generally more available and there are abundant income opportunities (i.e. post-harvest and tourist season). At the same time, it forecasted that the number of food insecure and vulnerable households would increase as the lean season – the pre-harvest period which also coincides with the rainy season (June – October) – approached. It recommended to closely monitor and track changes in household food security and vulnerability status over time, in particular in the event of external shocks.

The overall objective of the Rapid Food Security Assessment (hereafter RFSA) was to assess how the food security situation has evolved in the past 8 months since the baseline survey and capture changes in household food consumption and coping during the critical lean season. The assessment focused on the most vulnerable areas of The Gambia as identified by the CFSVA: Foni (WCR), Jarra Central and East (LRR), Lower Saloum (CRR North) and Janjanbureh (CRR South). Additionally, Banjul and Kanifing municipalities were included in the assessment in order to evaluate the changes in urban households' food security situation.

**Map 1: Food insecure and vulnerable areas in The Gambia (CFSVA) and communities visited (RFSA)**



More specifically, the assessment aimed to:

- capture changes in the food security situation and coping mechanisms used by rural and urban households compared to the dry season, taking into account factors such as increased food prices and harvest outlook for the 2011/2012 harvest;
- forecast the evolution of the food security situation in the next 12 months and describe the groups most likely to be food insecure; and
- recommend potential response options to address the immediate and underlying causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in the most vulnerable rural and urban areas of The Gambia.

The RFSA was conducted jointly by Department of Agriculture (Planning Services), GBOS, Action Aid The Gambia, FAO and WFP.

## **2. Methodology**

### *Literature review*

A thorough and critical literature review of existing information on the food security and nutrition situation of populations including previous VAM surveys (e.g. 2011 CFSVA), nutrition surveillance reports by the National Nutrition Agency, crop assessments, agricultural sample surveys, market price monitoring reports, early warning reports, etc.

### *Data collection*

Primary data was collected via i) key informant interviews governor's/mayor's office and members of the Regional Disaster Management Committees (including MoA and public health post extension officers and grass-root level NGOs), ii) focus group discussions with village heads (alkalo), Village Development Committees, and other opinion leaders (women and men groups separately) and iii) household interviews.

The 2011 CFSVA tools (a household questionnaire, a community questionnaire for focus group discussion, and a Key Informant questionnaire) were reviewed and used after necessary revision in order to ensure information on key food security and coping indicators are collected for comparative analysis. The results of the different sources were triangulated for final analysis.

### *Sampling*

A total of six areas were visited: four in the most vulnerable rural areas and two in the urban municipalities. One community/village was randomly selected within each area and up to ten households were randomly chosen within each community/village for interview. The total number of interviews conducted are as follows: Key informant interviews (6), Focus group discussions (12 – 6 each for men and women group), and household interviews (54).

### *Data entry and analysis*

Data collected was entered into a predefined simple database (in excel) during the field work to minimize data entry errors.

### *Limitations*

Unlike the CFSVA, the household data collected during the RFSA is not statistically significant due to the small sample size. However, conclusive statements can be made on the overall trend and for the purpose of comparison, it was attempted to cross reference the results with the CFSVA findings to the extent possible.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 Food Availability**

#### **3.1.1 Agriculture**

Agriculture is dominated by small holder and subsistence farming and the length of time that own produce will serve household consumption is limited. Almost 70% of households interviewed indicated that a typical harvest during periods of normal rainfall and good climatic conditions will serve household consumption for 1 – 4 months only. For nearly a third of households own food stocks usually last over five months, of which only 13% report almost a year-around consumption of own produce. During the assessment farming households were pessimistic about the agricultural outlook for the current season, indicating low and late rainfall, as well as intra-seasonal drought, as main problems affecting their farming activities. In addition prolonged outmigration of able bodied and fit for work household members is considered as a major bottleneck hampering family based farming. Concerns have been expressed over a drop in production and poor quality of crop for the upcoming harvest while borrowing and investment has been reported as above normal this year, further undermining farmers' resource base and preparations for the next planting season. In one community visited (Pa Chari Sana is a double cropping area), rice stocks are available at household level and expected to last at least another two months with new supplies of own produce expected only with the next harvest one year from now. Preliminary findings of the 2011 Joint CILLS/FEWS pre-harvest assessment confirm these views. On average, farmers questioned during the mission expect that the food they will produce will last them for 2-3 months only, down from 5-6 months during days considered as normal. Compared to this period in previous years food availability is expected to worsen at an earlier stage, commencing with January – February 2012.

Farming communities who depend primarily on the cultivation of rice, millet and groundnut for their food security, who have been already identified as vulnerable by the CFSVA and who have been impacted most by this year's climatic trends, are most likely to suffer from food insecurity in the coming period (Daa Nyeeno, Issue 2). According to the RFSA, 87% of the households are involved in farming, with the average size of land used being little more than 3ha. Of these, three out of four households interviewed are engaged in the farming of cereals and groundnuts, with over 80% reported owning the land (77.5% according to the CFSVA). Nearly 70% of interviewed households have a vegetable garden (37% being the national average). Of those engaged in farming main crops cultivated include rice (63% of households), early millet (61%), maize (50%) and groundnuts (48%). Rice is the most important staple food grown with 39% of households growing it as the primary crop. For almost a quarter of households early millet is a second or third priority, while maize is identified as a rather complimentary crop, being

the fourth crop on the list of priorities for 17% of the households. Groundnuts are either a first or second priority for 35% of the households and mainly used for income generation. Of the cereals grown, 85% of households use them exclusively for own consumption, while the remaining 15% prefer to either sell them, or both sale or consume. On the other hand, groundnuts are exclusively used for consumption by 18% of the households while 18% use them exclusively for sale. Almost two thirds of households prefer to use groundnuts for both consumption and sale.

### **3.1.2 Markets**

Almost all communities surveyed reported that food availability in markets is worse. Normally this is the time of the year when farmers start selling their produce in markets but because of the delayed harvest they do not have enough goods to sell. The RFSA team noted that in Kaur lumo, which is the biggest lumo in CRR North, there are few local cereals available and only some small quantities of early millet and maize were being sold. At the same time, those who do have some produce to sell reported that it is more difficult to sell because there are less buyers in the market compared to last year (an indication of decreased household purchasing power).

Most of the farmers in the surveyed areas visit weekly markets (lumos) to sell their produce. In one community, farmer households reported that they spend approximately D35 to access the nearby lumo whereby D15 is spent for transport (increased from D10 last year), D5 for storage fee and D15 for baggage and offloading.

## **3.2 Food Access**

### **3.2.1 Livelihoods and income sources**

The most common income sources for surveyed households are sale of food crop (67 percent), sale of cash crop (35 percent) and non-agricultural wage labour (19 percent). In case of Banjul and Kanifing, the most common income sources are business/entrepreneur and salaried employee. The market prices for major local food crops (local paddy rice, millet, sorghum and maize) are 1% higher in September 2011 than compared with the same period in 2010 while this figure stands at 12% for groundnuts. Over the long term, the prices of local food crops have grown more significantly, reaching on average a 39% higher level than in September 2008 during the food price crisis while the market price for unshelled groundnuts dropped by 7% for the same reference period. However, given the uncertain harvest prospects for this year's cropping season it is unlikely that farmers will benefit from the price increase.

The proportion of households that rely on remittances as a main income source is 13 percent, which is significantly less than the average at national level according to the CFSVA (25 percent). Especially pronounced is the reliance on remittances at the community level: in one community (Pa Chari Sana) approximately 15-20 percent of community members reportedly received remittances. Even if sent on a random basis at about D300-500 per month, remittances are used for unusual expenses such as housing repair or expenditures related to religious festivities. Results of the community interviews revealed that there has not been a significant change in the amount received since January and in some cases, there was even a slight increase, which can be most likely attributed to seasonality related transfers such as religious festivities or the beginning of schooling. However, households report receiving an overall



lower level of remittances compared to the same period last year, by some even characterized as insignificant for household consumption.

The proportion of surveyed households that reported an annual household income less than D20,000 is 65 percent, well above the national average (45 percent of households) level according to the CFSVA. Compared to the month of January, fifty percent of surveyed households reported that their income increased in September as opposed to 34 percent of households that reported a decrease in their income. The majority of households in Janjanbureh and Fonis reported an increase in their income whereas in Banjul, Kanifing, Jarra Central and East and Lower Saloum, there were more households that reported a decrease. However, the increase of income may be again attributed to seasonal factors, such as the mobilization of additional resources for the beginning of the school year, upcoming harvest or festivities mainly driven by an increased inflow of remittances within that period.

However, households and communities surveyed unanimously reported that they are able to buy less than before with the same amount of income and attributed this mainly to rising food prices and cost of living. Particularly highlighted has been the increase in prices for cereals including rice and fish. Reportedly a 50kg bag of imported rice cost D950 this year compared to D750-800 same time last year (18% percent increase). According to figures from the Department of Trade and Gambian Bureau of Statistics average prices for imported rice (100% broken) have risen by 16% compared to September 2010 with rice prices on the international market expected to rise further (Daa Nyeeno, Issue 2, November 2011). The Gambia is particularly vulnerable to food price rises as over 30% of cereal needs are covered by imported rice (Cross Border Trade and Food Security in West Africa; WFP, March 2010) The price of local rice also increased although it varied within the range of D3.50 to D7 per cup (by comparison, imported rice cost D6 per cup).

The RFSA team also found out that the unfavorable Dalasi/CFA exchange rate is also hurting consumers by driving import prices further up: the Gambian Dalasi has consistently weakened against CFA since January and official exchange rate stood at D300/CFA 5,000 at the time of the report writing. Vendors in Farafenni market, the major market in the North Bank region, confirmed this observation by saying per CFA 5,000 exchange rate worsened within a year from D250 to D315. In fact, compared to the same period in 2010 the Dalasi has depreciated in September 2011 by 1.7% against the US Dollar and 11.9% against the CFA (OANDA).

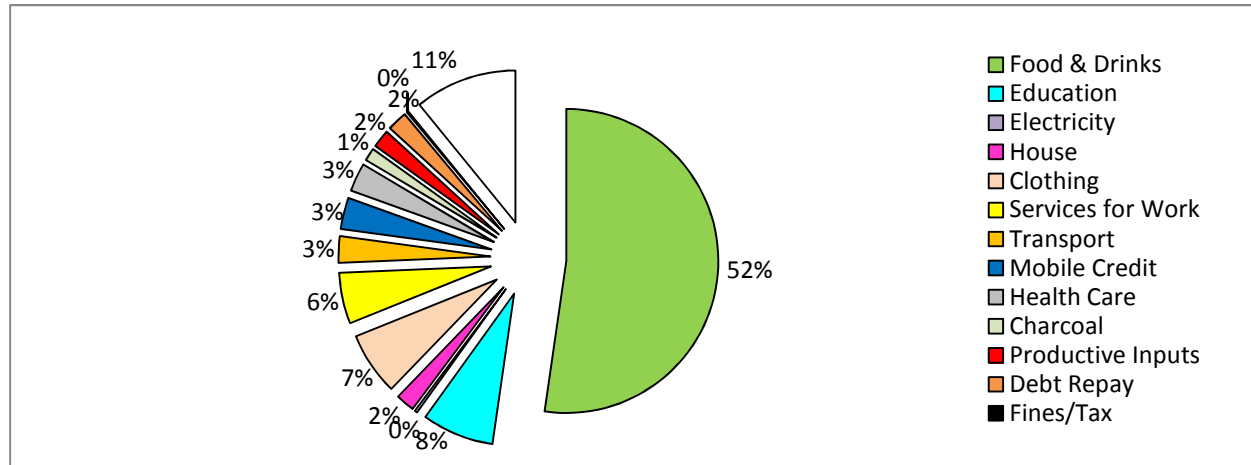
### **3.2.2 Expenditures**

During the period of data collection households have been asked of their expenditure pattern in the last 30 days, covering predominantly the month of September. On average, monthly household expenditure has been observed at D 8,470, above the national average recorded in January (D 7,860), while per capita expenditure has been identical with 858 Dalasi compared to the national average in January (D 854). However, significant variations were observed according to geographical area visited with Banjul and Kanifing recording average per capita expenditure of D 1,940 compared to the provinces with D 631. Overall, 75% of households interviewed recorded monthly per capita expenditure of below D1000 (33

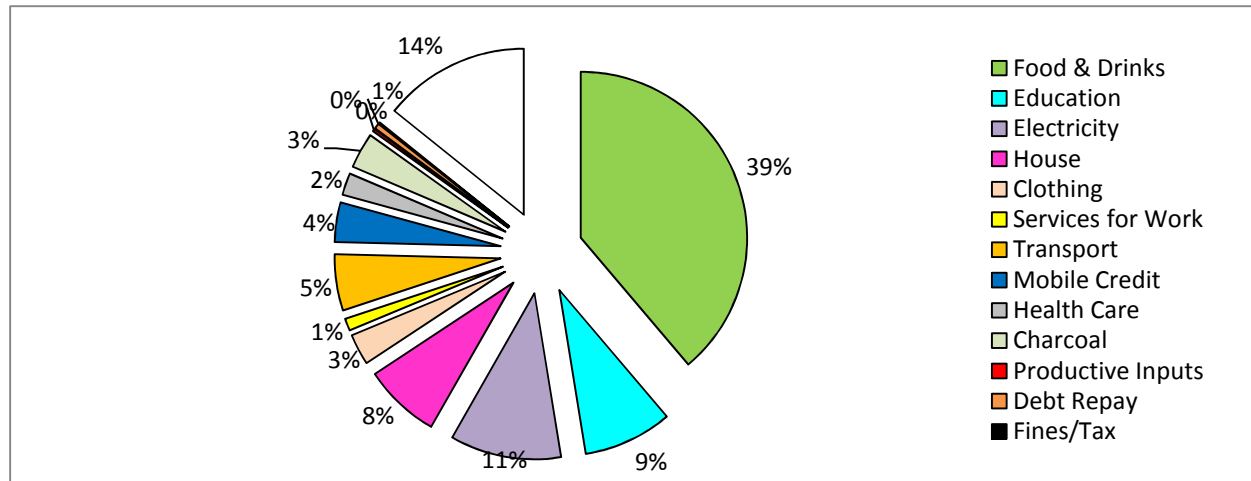
USD), including 40% of households whose overall per capita expenditure was even below D 500 (17 USD) most of which were situated in the provinces.

Of the entire surveyed population, expenditure for food accounts for 49% of total expenditure, compared to 58% as established by the CFSVA. However, variations have been again noted between areas with households in Banjul and Kanifing recording 39% as a share of income being spent on food while in the provinces this figure stood at 52%.

**Figure 1 – Share of household expenditure in September 2011 (Provinces)**



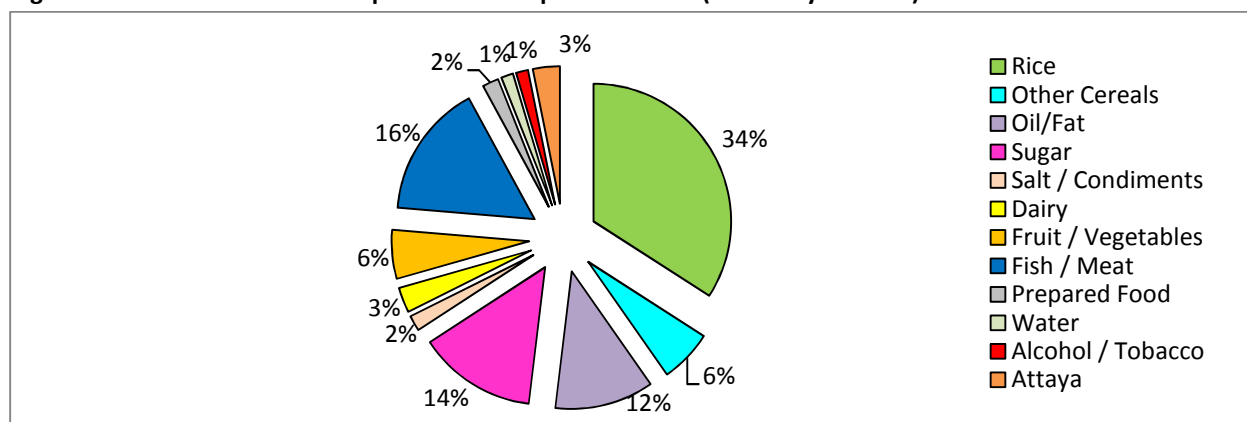
**Figure 2 – Share of household expenditure in September 2011 (Banjul and KMC)**



In terms of expenditure for specific food category, the biggest share is allocated to rice with 34% (up from 29% in January), followed by fish and meat with 16% (no change), sugar with 14% (15% in January) and oil with 12% (13% in January). A notable difference occurs again according to areas visited. Most importantly, in the provinces more than a third of income that is envisaged for food is allocated to rice (37%) while that figure stands at 22% in Banjul and Kanifing based households. To the contrary, while fish and meat take up 14% of a household’s food budget in the provinces this figure stands at 23% in the urban areas. For the period of reference (pre-harvest) this would reflect heightened vulnerability of

households in the provinces, in particular with regard to rising staple food prices and lower intake of animal protein as opposed to Banjul and Kanifing based households.

**Figure 3 – Share of household expenditure in September 2011 (All surveyed areas)**



In line with the findings of the CFSVA, the poorer a household the more likely it will spend a large share of its income on food. In September, 75% of the households spent on average 62% of their income on food, compared to 58% being the national average in January. In concrete terms this would mean that for three out of four households average per capita expenditure in September would be D445 (15 USD) of which average per capita expenditure on food would amount to D267 (9 USD). Within that population most vulnerable seem to be 40% of households whose average per capita expenditure does not exceed D250 (8 USD) whilst the per capita expenditure on food is minimal at D 162 (5 USD) in September, further suggesting heightened vulnerability to food insecurity for the month of September.<sup>2</sup>

		Total Expenditure (Dalasi)	Per Capita Expenditure (Dalasi)	% of Expenditure for Food	% of Households		
					Total	Provinces	BJL & KMC
Wealth Groups	Lowest	2,504	121	61%	21%	21%	0%
	Low	6,128	390	70%	19%	15%	4%
	Medium	7,802	674	55%	35%	33%	2%
	Medium-high	14,158	1,366	49%	12%	10%	2%
	Highest	18,036	2,719	31%	13%	4%	10%
					100%	83%	17%

**Table 1 – Wealth groups based on total expenditure in September 2011 (All surveyed areas)**

<sup>2</sup> The classification of wealth groups used here is for illustrative purposes only and does not follow the same methodology as in the CFSVA where wealth groups have been classified according to total annual income. To get a better feeling of household vulnerability at a particular period of time (September) the wealth group classification used in the RFSVA is based on predefined expenditure ranges per capita for the one period in question. For example, the lowest wealth group as defined by the RFSVA contains households whose per capita expenditure for the month of September falls within the range of 0 – 250 Dalasi, followed by the low wealth group (251 – 500 dalasi), the medium wealth group (501 – 1000 Dalasi), the medium-high wealth group (1001 – 2000 Dalasi) and the highest wealth group (2001 Dalasi or higher). If the monthly expenditure for September were extrapolated to the entire year then almost all households (43 out of 44) within the lowest four wealth groups as defined in the RFSVA would fall within the lowest total annual income wealth group as defined by the CFSVA (D 20,000 or lower annual income) thereby suggesting lower purchasing power of most interviewed households in September (85% of households below 20,000 annual income level) as compared to the January baseline (70%).

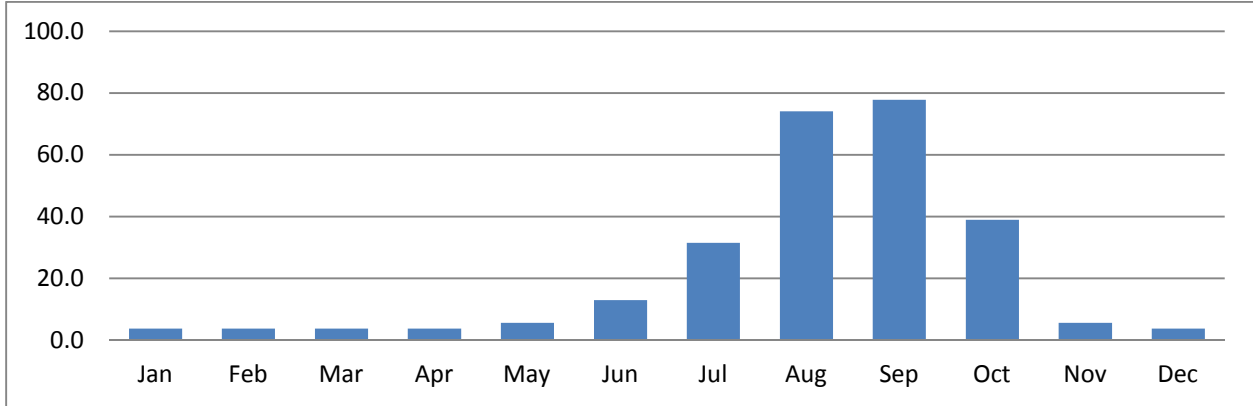
The increased share of overall expenditure being destined for food also explains most of households’ motivation to engage in borrowing. Approximately 44 percent of households borrowed money in the preceding three months. The average amount borrowed was higher in Banjul and Kanifing (D2,919) compared to the provinces (D1,338). The most common reason for borrowing was to buy food (50%) followed by school related expenditures (17%). Communities reported that school related expenditures were a major burden to households. Overall, money borrowed tends to be spent for immediate consumption rather than put into investment with the ability to save money being very minimal or non-existent and indebtedness being a major problem. As one female respondent from the vicinity of Banjul put it: *“I owe so much money for the purchase of food items at the market that I have to now resort to avoiding certain parts of the market”*.

**3.3. Food Utilization**

**3.3.1 Food consumption and coping**

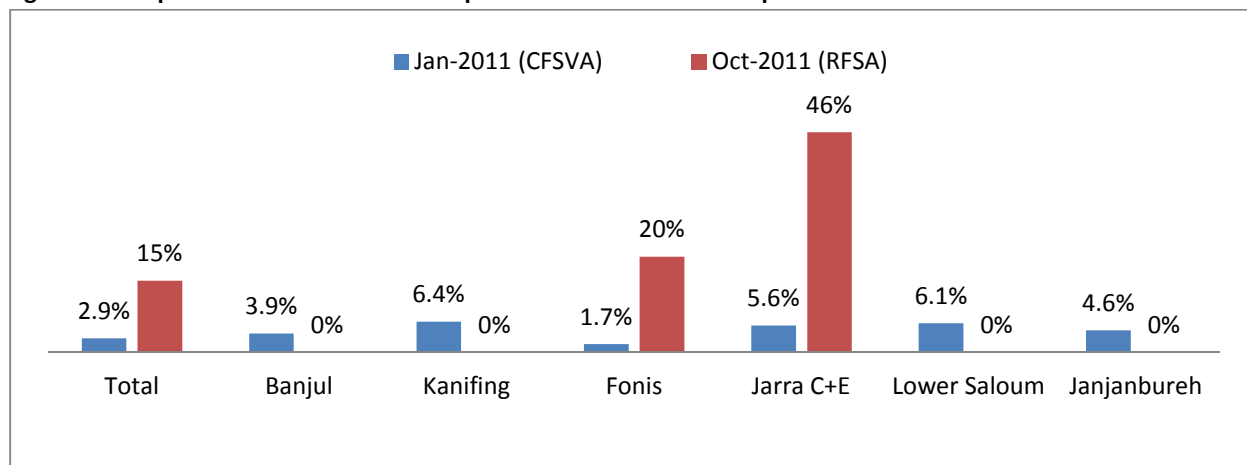
On average adults eat three times a day and children three to four times. The majority of households (94%) reported that this is usual during this time of the year. For all food items consumed in September except for coarse grains (most notably millet, sorghum and maize), the majority of households (58%) depended on food purchases rather than own production or other ways of sourcing. Almost 80% of households reported that August and September are the months most difficult in having enough food. However, approximately 39 percent of households mentioned October as the most difficult month as well, an indication of current food insecurity.

**Figure 4 – Share of surveyed households who find it difficult to provide sufficient food for household consumption by individual months**



In fact 15 percent of the households in surveyed areas have poor or borderline food consumption compared to approximately 3 percent back in January 2011. Jarra Central and East has the highest proportion of households (46 percent) with poor or borderline food consumption.

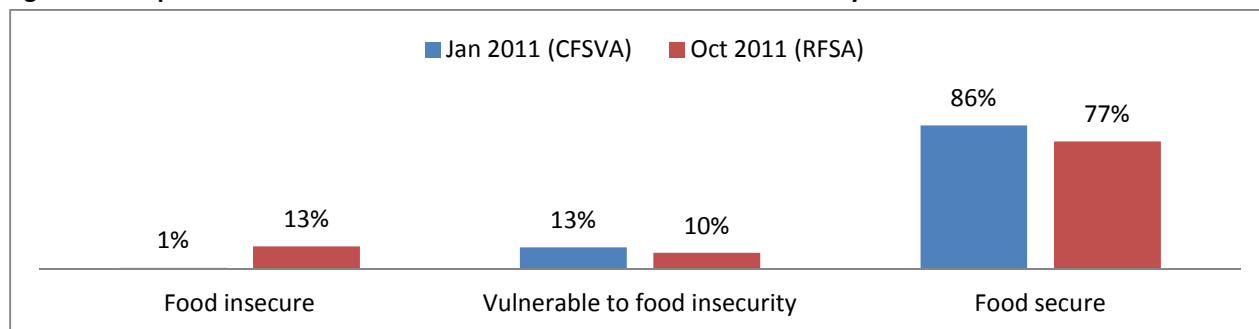
**Figure 5 – Proportion of households with poor or borderline consumption**



Food consumption patterns alone cannot adequately reflect the level of overall household food security as it merely provides a snapshot of the current food consumption (and therefore current access to food) without sufficiently considering elements related to seasonality or sustainability as well as vulnerability. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, households were grouped into three different food security categories (food insecure, vulnerable to food insecurity and food secure) by taking into account households' ability to access food and potential vulnerability in case of a shock<sup>3</sup>.

The RFSA found out that the proportion of food insecure households in the surveyed areas increased from 1 percent to 13 percent while the proportion of food secure households dropped by 9 percent compared to the situation in January. The results point towards a deteriorating trend where previously food secure and vulnerable households (approximately 12 percent) are pushed into the food insecure category. However, data limitations inherent in the small sample prevent us from making more conclusive statements as to the overall gravity of food insecurity in the surveyed areas by using the current methodology. From the above discussion on the low level of per capita expenditure devoted to food, it can be deduced that overall food security levels for the reference period could be even higher given the important role poverty plays in determining household food access.

**Figure 6 – Proportion of food insecure or vulnerable households in the surveyed areas**



<sup>3</sup> The same methodology applied to the CFSVA (Food Consumption Score) was used for the RFSA analysis for the purpose of comparison. For details, please refer to <http://www.wfp.org/content/gambia-comprehensive-food-security-and-vulnerability-analysis-2011>.

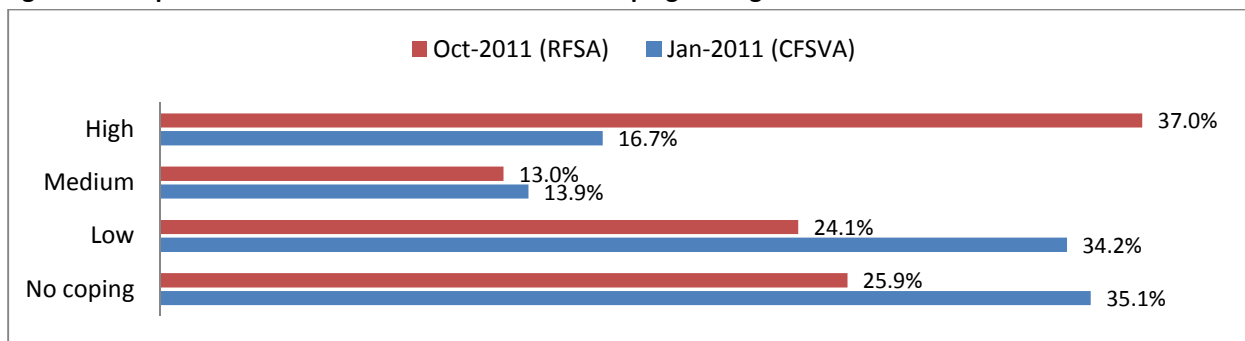
In order to better understand how they cope in response to food access constraints, households were asked what type of food-related coping strategies among the following they used in the past seven days:

1. Rely on less preferred/expensive foods
2. Borrow food or rely on help from friends/relatives;
3. Limit portion size at meal times;
4. Restrict consumption by adults in order for small children to eat; and
5. Reduce the number of meals eaten in a day.

The information on coping was further used to classify households into four different groups (high coping, medium coping, low coping and no coping) according to the extent of the coping strategies employed<sup>4</sup>.

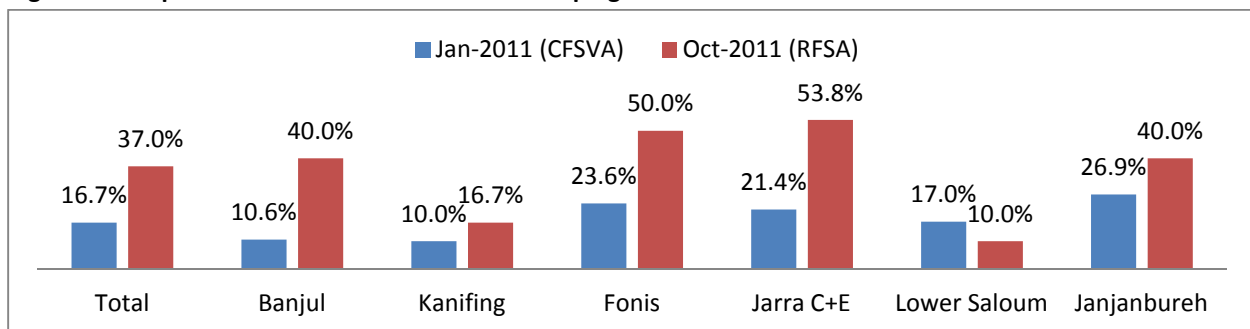
On average, 74 percent of surveyed households employed some type of food related coping strategies as opposed to 65 percent back in January. In particular, the proportion of households classified in the high coping category (i.e. employing more severe coping strategies) is 37 percent which is more than twice as much as the proportion of such households eight months ago when the CFSVA was conducted.

**Figure 7 – Proportion of households with food related coping strategies**



As the chart below shows, the proportion of households in the high coping category (i.e. severe coping) is consistently higher in all surveyed areas compared to eight months ago when the CFSVA was conducted with the sole exception of Lower Saloum.

**Figure 8 – Proportion of households with severe coping**



<sup>4</sup> The indicator used for this analysis is the reduced Coping Strategy Index (CSI) as per the standard methodology developed jointly by CARE and WFP. The classification from high to no coping is according to severity be descending order.

Some of the non food related coping strategies that are commonly employed in the communities include:

- sale of cash crop (in particular beans and incense), garden vegetables and livestock;
- seeking help from better off relatives;
- borrowing food and money from businessmen (especially shop keepers) who usually charge high interest rates;

Whilst there was no indication of households engaging in negative coping such as withdrawing children from schools or sale of productive assets, it has been noted that more intensified deforestation activities are ongoing in some communities in order for households to meet basic income needs, at the expense of long term environmental sustainability.

### **3.4 Cross-cutting issues**

#### **3.4.1 Demographic characteristics**

According to the last population census (2003, GBOS) the average household size in The Gambia is 8.3. Approximately 72 percent of households interviewed during the RFSA were found to have 8 or more household members. The proportion of female headed households in each community averaged at 24 percent of the entire community, most of who (but especially widows with young children and infants) were considered to be most vulnerable together with the elderly and pregnant and lactating women. Although women in communities interviewed take part in meetings, their influence on decision-making and land ownership seems to be limited, mostly possible through the registration with Kafo groups<sup>5</sup>. In one community (Kaur Touray Kunda), women farmers reported that the daily wage rate for farm labour is less for women (D35) compared to men (D50). On the other hand, men in Banjul reported to have little access to credit whilst women are seen to be privileged by local credit schemes.

Communities reported an outmigration of young graduates and able bodied to the urban areas in search of employment, with temporary return during the rainy season to assist families with farming. Overall it seems that prolonged outmigration is the rather dominant trend compared with the return to farming activities during the lean season. In one community (Sutusinjang, Fonis) it was revealed that of those household members who were considered able bodied and fit for work almost half had left the household for better income opportunities in the Kombos, for a prolonged period of time. In a typical scenario the remaining three to four members who were fit for work catered for a remaining household of thirteen. Household heads typically complained that this would have a negative effect on their agricultural production with only few people available to work on the farm, thus limiting overall family output.

---

<sup>5</sup> Female ownership of land is possible either through registration by Kafo groups or heritage. However, ownership through Kafo is more secure because inherited land will most likely be withdrawn from women in case the husband dies. A woman secures land as a wife, sister or mother. Whereas, land is withdrawn in case husband dies, she can obtain land as a sister or a mother.

Lack of adequate vocational skills was mentioned as the main constraint for migrating youth to get proper employment. Youth employment was particularly a major concern for Kanifing where it is tentatively estimated at approximately 40 percent.

### **3.4.2 Water, health and sanitation**

The majority of surveyed households (69 percent) reported using traditional pit latrines. However, the proportion of households using unimproved sanitation facilities (open pit, bush or stream) is 11 percent which is almost twice as much the national average according to the CFSVA. In particular, Jappineh Tembeto had the highest number of households using unimproved sanitation facilities (23%).

Approximately 83 percent of surveyed households reported paying for water: the cost varied from D25 per month in the case of a communal tap to D75 per month for a tap for private use within the compound. The share of total monthly household expenditure on water was estimated at 0.7 percent which is comparable to the CFSVA findings in January (approximately 1 percent).

Physical access to water was not found to be a major concern for surveyed households who reported that the main source of water is located at a distance of 13 minutes or 70 metres on average. However at least in one community surveyed (Pa Chari Sanah), the lack of potable water due to insufficient number of wells was highlighted as a factor that negatively impacts food security. There were also reports of increasing number of children being affected by water born skin disease (Kaur Touray Kunda).

Most common diseases reported at Public Health Centre during the past few months are malaria, pneumonia and diarrhea. It should be noted that the period during which the RFSA took place coincided with the time of the year when traditionally the number of malaria patients increase rapidly (September – October). In most focus group discussions, high blood pressure has been also identified as a major health concern. Public Health Nurses in CRR and Kaur reported that there is a worsening trend in under five wasting and underweight and maternal mortality.

Communities surveyed reported that health centres are available and accessible although there is a lack of medication and patients are often referred to pharmacies where the necessary medication is more costly. Consultation fees at health centres are D1 for children, D5 for drugs and D10 for lab tests.

### **3.4.3 Infrastructure and disaster preparedness**

Inadequate infrastructure is a chronic factor that negatively impacts food security at household and community levels in all surveyed areas. Farmer communities are seeking external assistance in addressing the issue of inaccessibility to rice fields due to blockage of feeder roads during the rainy season, even though parallel improvements can be observed with the development of main roads and access to main markets. On the other hand, despite the improvements made in emergency preparedness measures in Banjul and Kanifing areas (e.g. clearing of drainage and community sensitization on waste management) there is still work to be done in addressing land use and settlement issues and in particular preventing building sites on water ways.



#### **3.4.4 Credit**

Approximately 31 percent of households surveyed reported having a savings account most of whom have an account either with a commercial bank or VISACA. A few households reported to have some savings with shop keepers. Of those households with an account, the majority (48 percent) reported having savings of up to 3,400 Dalasis or less, while 18 percent reported having a no savings at all during the time of data collection. In one community (Pa Chari Sana), 30 percent of households reportedly have accounts with VISACA (which requires an opening balance of D100-150), out of which only one third have some savings. By comparison, another community (Kaur) reported that VISACA has not been functioning in the last five years, raising some questions about the coverage of this micro finance scheme in the most vulnerable rural areas. According to the CFSVA, all vulnerable areas except for Jarra Central and East have a below national average proportion of households (43 percent) who have access to credit. In particular, Lower Saloum and Kanifing have the lowest proportion of households with credit access with 13 percent and 19 percent respectively.

The most common source of borrowing are friends/family inside the Gambia (for 38 percent of households surveyed) and shopkeepers (33 percent). Community interviews suggested that households in the most vulnerable areas may not be aware of loan services by Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) and most of the borrowing was realized through Kafos and farmer associations. Access to formal MFIs seems to be an issue with high interest rates (e.g. VISACA 10% on savings and 15% on loans; Reliance Bank 20+% on loans; commercial banks 30% on loans), small disbursement amount and short payment period. The MFIs on the other hand reportedly prefer to issue group loans of D10,000 to a group of 30-40 people at a time (for instance to farmer associations) after having had a number of instances when loans were not paid back.

The Social Development Fund used to have the most comprehensive coverage in terms of micro credits services but has shifted its focus to training on entrepreneurship and linking with other MFIs (e.g. Reliance, VISACAs) by now.

#### **3.4.5 Assistance received and main priorities**

Of the interviewed households, 61% reported receiving food based assistance, predominantly in rural areas. However, 58% of that assistance was identified as the President's Ramadan Gift serving the households not longer than a handful of days, while 24% reported to benefit from a more long-term based assistance such as school feeding. One out of four households reported benefiting also from non-food assistance.

## **4. Conclusion**

- Food consumption pattern as such has not deteriorated as the results of Food Consumption Score analysis show. However, households are not able to afford the same level of food consumption due to rising food prices. As a result they spend on average a greater share of their income on food items than in January and narrow down the variety of ingredients used at meal times.

- The level of food insecurity and vulnerability has increased mainly because of uncertain harvest prospects and rising food prices, particularly affecting already vulnerable rural areas which will additionally face potential harvest deficits as well as the urban poor.
- Rainfall in 2011 has been on average 37% lower than in 2010 and 10% below normal, with significant variations across regions and time. Most affected seem to be farmers in the North Bank Region, Lower River Region and Upper River Region where rainfall was recorded at 35%, 40% and 20% below normal respectively, in particular during the beginning of the planting season.
- The low, late and erratic rainfall has affected the development of crops in their reproductive stage leading to potential low yields and poor quality of crops. The nature of rainfall has also negatively affected farmers' income who reported above normal borrowing and investment in seeds and fertilizer due to the need for repeated planting as a result of re-occurring dry spells. Apart from the more immediate impact on the upcoming harvest and farmers' food and income security, low rainfall may give cause for concern in terms of seed security for the next planting period.
- Food prices are expected to be further on the rise. Main compounding factors are international market trends and a potential drop in local agricultural production. Current price levels of main staple foods are only 2% below the price level of the 2008 food price crisis, in particular for imported rice, while rural households are expected to source from their own production for only 2-3 months after the harvest.

## 5. Recommendations

- No food assistance recommended for the time being but it might be necessary from the first quarter of 2012 until the next harvest.
- A comprehensive post-harvest assessment should be conducted to determine the magnitude of and population most affected by the potential drop in agricultural production.
- Prices of imported and locally produced staple foods should be closely monitored and their impact on household food access examined via regular households surveillance.
- Contingency plans for potential assistance should be elaborated, including cash & voucher options in the context of possible emergencies.