



Emergency Food Security Assessment in Southern Shan State

Key Findings....

- In the communities affected by poppy eradication in Pinlaung and Pekon, the food security situation in January 2012 was stable and no immediate assistance was deemed necessary.
- Paddy production actually increased from 2010 to 2011, with food stocks likely sufficient until early to mid-June.
- Household diets are more diverse in Pekon and Pinlaung than diets in surrounding townships where WFP is currently active. This suggests that food access remains sufficient despite poppy eradication efforts.
- Market purchases are the main source of rice for households, suggesting household income remains sufficient to afford basic food needs despite poppy eradication efforts. Few households are forced to purchase food on credit or borrow from friends/ relatives, two of the key coping strategies that households rely on when unable to meet food needs.
- A follow up assessment is recommended in June 2012 to assess the continued resilience of communities as food stocks begin to dwindle. If assistance is deemed necessary, food or cash-based assistance will be considered.

Background

In 2011, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar stepped up poppy eradication efforts, destroying standing poppy crops throughout the country. Recognizing the impact this campaign was having on community livelihoods, the Government requested UN Agencies, and particularly the World Food Programme (WFP), to provide emergency assistance in areas where poppy eradication efforts were significantly impacting household food security status. Requests for assistance were first received in January 2012 for communities in two townships in southern Shan State, Pekon and Pinlaung (See Figure 1).

To assess immediate needs in these communities, WFP conducted a rapid emergency food security assessment in late

January. This report outlines the findings of this assessment and provides recommendations on the most appropriate ways forward.

Methodology

The objective of this assessment was to explore the extent to which household food security status has been impacted by Government poppy eradication efforts.

Designed as a rapid assessment, WFP assessed the 10 villages identified as most affected by the Government. *Thus, findings apply only to the 10 villages assessed and cannot be generalized to other communities in Pekon and Pinlaung townships.* In each village, one key informant interview was conducted as were 20 household interviews.

The key informant and household questionnaires included indicators of dietary adequacy and hunger

including the household dietary diversity scale and the household hunger scale. Questionnaires were designed to collect comparable information to WFP's food security monitoring system and surveys by other partners.

Data collection started in mid January and continued throughout the month. Data analysis was completed in February.

Post eradication food security situation

Typically, poppy is planted alongside winter crops, with poppy plants harvested between late January and March. As this assessment was conducted in mid January, findings characterize the situation prior to the anticipated poppy harvest, and thus prior to full impact of income loss on communities. Thus, it is likely the food security situation as depicted

Pinlaung than Pekon (34% versus 8%) but still substantially less than in Hsihseng.

A closer look at the types of food items consumed shows more frequent consumption of meats and fruits as the primary reason for observed differences between diets in Pekon, Pinlaung and Hsihseng. For example, 68% of households in surveyed villages in Pekon reported meat consumption in the day preceding the survey versus only 29% in Hsihseng. Likewise, fruit was consumed by 34% of households in Pekon versus only 10% in Hsihseng. Meat and fruit consumption were also more frequent in Pinlaung than Hsihseng but differences were significantly less pronounced.

Purchase and own production remained the primary sources of rice at the time of survey, with only a small percent relying on credit, bartering and/ or food gifts. On average, 40-50% of households reported purchasing rice while approximately 30% reported reliance on own production. Only 11-13% of households reported purchasing rice on credit, 8-10% reported working or exchanging items for food and fewer than 5% were reliant on food gifts from friends or relatives. The fact that households were able to access rice without adopting destructive coping strategies suggests continued resilience in these communities, despite the lost poppy-related incomes.

Given the relative diversity of diets as well as the continued ability of households to purchase rice, it was not surprising that less than 1% of households reported severe hunger³. Moderate hunger⁴ was

³ Severe hunger is defined as having a household hunger score of between 4-6 and largely denotes frequent occurrences of acute food shortages)

Figure 3. Percent of households with poor or borderline food consumption

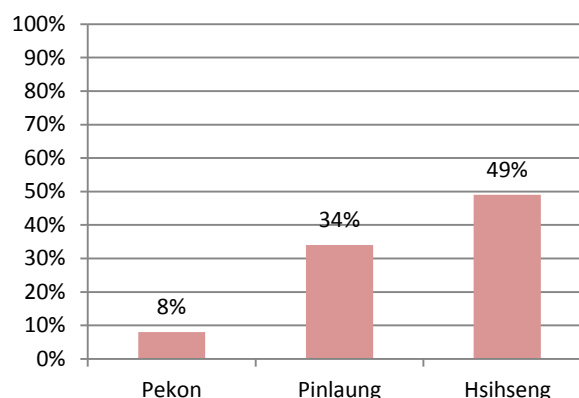
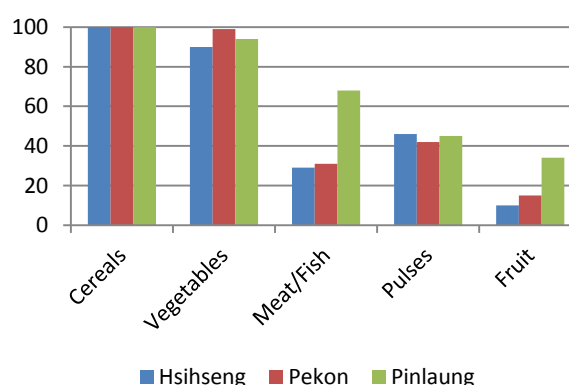


Figure 4. Percent of households that consumed each food item in the day preceding the survey



more common but only reported by one-fifth of households.

Market access and commodity prices

As implied by the reliance on staple food purchases, market access is relatively sufficient in the communities surveyed. While only one of the 10 communities reported a village market, all villages report being able to access nearby markets via road.

⁴ Moderate hunger is defined as a household hunger score of 2-4 and largely denotes rare occurrences of acute food shortages)

The poppy eradication efforts did not appear to be affecting local staple food prices nor daily wage labour rates. Rice prices were cheaper in Pinlaung and Pekon (356 MMK/ Kg) than in Taunggyi (423 MMK/Kg) and similar to prices observed in local markets in Hsihseng (352 MMK/Kg). Daily wage labour rates were also similar (2100 MMK/day in Pinlaung and Pekon versus 2000 MMK/Kg in Taunggyi and Hsihseng).

The relative parity in rice prices suggests a level of market integration that may make it

possible for cash-rather than food-based programming, if assistance is later deemed necessary in these communities.

Health and nutrition

One of the most concerning findings from this assessment was the apparent high disease burdens amongst children under 5 years of age in Pekon. Here, over half of all children reported fevers (55.1%) and acute respiratory infections (ARI-59.4%). Over one-quarter also reported diarrhoea. Reasons for very high disease burdens were not clear but they could have severe implications on child nutritional status, as sick children often consume and absorb fewer nutrients.

Disease was much less common in Pinlaung, with less than one-fifth of children reportedly impacted by diarrhoea, fevers or ARIs.

Food security situation moving forward

As indicated previously, the food security situation at the time of survey was stable in communities in both townships, with the bulk of evidence pointing to near-term food sufficiency and adequate food access at the household level. This is evidenced by:

- Increased paddy production in 2011 versus 2010
- Household diets are relatively diverse, at least when compared to WFP project areas in other parts of Southern Shan State.
- Most households continue to have sufficient income to afford staple foods, despite poppy eradication efforts
- Few households are forced to purchase food on credit or borrow from friends/ relatives, two of the key coping strategies

that households rely on when unable to meet food needs.

The prognosis for the coming months, however, is less positive. Cereals stocks will not be sufficient to last households until the next harvest, with stocks likely exhausted by the beginning of the traditional hunger gap (June). While the hunger gap affects many communities throughout Myanmar (and certainly does not always necessitate food assistance), the concern for both Pinlaung and Pekon is that their traditional coping mechanisms (income from poppy sales) have been seriously impacted, making it significantly more difficult for communities to meet food needs during the hunger gap. This said, it is also possible that these communities have a network of coping capacities, outside of poppy cultivation, that will enable them to bridge any food gaps. Thus, the food security situation will need to be re-assessed at the beginning of June to determine if assistance will be required in some form.

It is also important to note that dietary diversity differs quite significantly between communities in Pekon and Pinlaung, with much larger percentages of households reporting inadequate diets in Pinlaung. This appears driven by higher levels of animal protein (meat, fish) consumption in Pekon. Programmatically, this suggests a need for protein as well as cereal provision in Pinlaung while cereal provision alone may be adequate in Pekon (if assistance is deemed necessary).

If reassessment of the situation in June indicates a need for assistance during the hunger gap, then the modality of assistance will need to be determined. As loss of poppy plants is primarily an

income loss shock, there may be a role for cash-based programming, thus enabling the communities to resume their normal coping activities (purchasing food) while also supporting the local traders that are also accustomed (via greater demand) to benefiting from poppy-based incomes. The argument for a cash-based response is bolstered by good market access and sufficient market integration. Of course, both market access and integration should be monitored in the coming months as both may be impacted by the approaching monsoon season.

Alongside food security responses, the health and nutrition situation needs to be closely monitored in the next few months as large percentages of children under-5 were reportedly affected by diarrhoea, fevers and acute respiratory infections in villages in Pekon. Health and nutrition sector responses would be the most appropriate way to address this situation, as high disease burdens can impact child mortality as well as child nutritional status. This said, increasing malnutrition rates often require a complementary food-based intervention. WFP will thus continue to monitor this situation.

Figure 5 summarizes the recommended ways forward.

Figure 5. Recommended way forward given food stocks will likely be exhausted by June

