



# Cameroon

Comprehensive Food Security and  
Vulnerability Analysis

April/May 2011



WFP

World Food  
Programme





Photo: Jane Howard

### How was the study done?

The study is based on an analysis of data collected between 18 April and 17 May 2011, from 3,000 rural and 3,300 urban households. The period corresponded to a time of sufficient food availability in most of the country, except for the West. It covered rural and urban areas.

## Food insecurity high despite great agricultural potential

Cameroon has great agricultural potential. The country's vast tracts of arable land, its climate and agro-ecological conditions favour a wide variety of crops. It also has great export potential because of the growing food demands of other countries in the region.

But despite recent increases in agricultural production Cameroon is importing around a quarter of its cereal requirements to feed its current population, which is predicted to double to some 40 million in the next 30 years.

## Rural Cameroon is hardest hit

In rural areas, 9.6% of households are considered food insecure (2.2% severely and 7.4% moderately). This means they don't produce enough for their own consumption and their poverty levels prevent them from accessing sufficient quantities of and/or quality food.

A further 10% of rural households are in a state of 'relative' food insecurity, meaning their food consumption is unsatisfactory, perhaps as a result of recent shocks and/or eating habits and cultural practices. Almost half experienced a shock in the last year.

Food insecurity is less prevalent in the 10 regional capitals of the country, where 6.7% of the households are food insecure (0.7% severely and 6% moderately). Severe urban food insecurity is highest in regional capital Douala (1.7% of households).

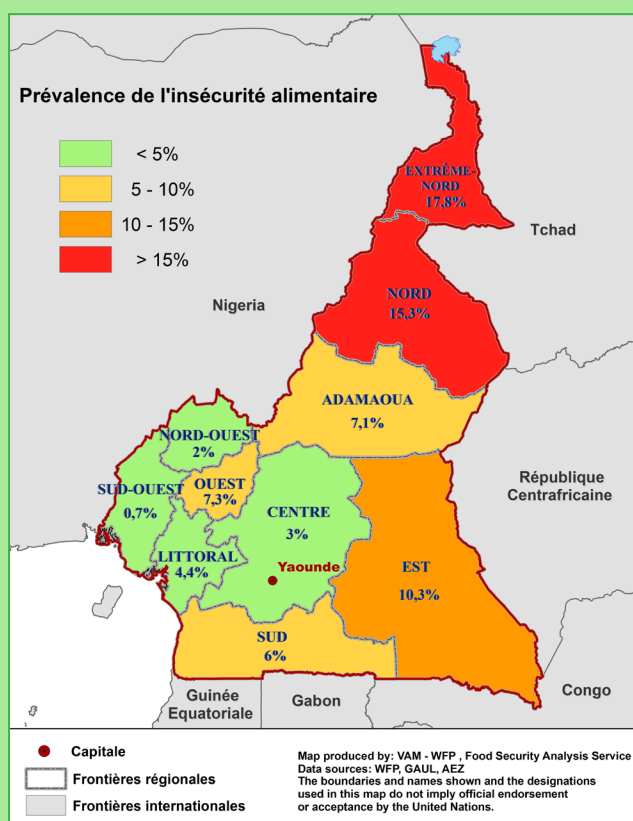
In both the rural and urban areas surveyed, slightly more than 30% of households are vulnerable to food insecurity. Their food consumption is currently acceptable, but in case of recurrent shocks, they tend to adopt coping strategies such as buying cheaper food, reducing meal sizes and/or cutting the number of meals. Almost two thirds of such rural households used coping strategies in the week running up to the survey.

In rural areas food insecure households are mainly farmers, but also daily labourers, small livestock breeders, hunters and fishermen. In urban areas, food insecure households are the petty traders, daily labourers, and households that rely on gifts and assistance and/or borrow to make a living.



Photo: Jane Howard

### Prevalence of food insecurity



## Intervention is most urgent in the North

The state of food insecurity varies considerably by region with the two northern regions, which are the most populated in the country, the hardest hit. Food security here has deteriorated since 2007, perhaps not in terms of prevalence but in terms of pure numbers of people because of the population growth.

Here about 615,000 people are food insecure even at a time of relative food availability. During the lean season, figures are likely to be higher. Some 63% of households in the North and 47% in the Extreme North resort to consuming less preferred food to cope with shortages.

The two regions also have the highest rates of severe food insecurity (4.1% of households in the Extreme-North and 3.7% in the North).

Malnutrition rates are highest too with Global Acute Malnutrition rates for under fives around 8% in December 2010. This situation is considered poor by WHO standards. Chronic malnutrition reached critical levels affecting more than 40% of children under five in both regions.

These regions must be prioritized for interventions. Not only are food insecurity levels highest but the indicators for poverty, healthcare, education, access to improved water sources and living conditions are also the worst. They also tend to experience more recurrent climatic shocks.



Photo: Jane Howard

## Prevalence of food insecurity – April/May 2011

	Severe food insecurity	Moderate food insecurity	Relative food insecurity	Vulnerability	Food security
Adamaoua	0.0%	7.1%	3.2%	32.9%	56.7%
Centre	0.7%	2.3%	22.7%	2.3%	72%
Est	1.2%	9.1%	17.9%	13.5%	58.3%
Extrême-Nord	4.1%	13.8%	1.9%	61.6%	18.6%
Littoral	1.6%	2.8%	25.4%	3.6%	66.7%
Nord	3.7%	11.7%	3%	66.3%	15.3%
Nord-Ouest	0.3%	1.7%	8%	5.3%	84.7%
Ouest	3.3%	4%	25%	5.7%	62%
Sud	0.8%	5.2%	36.5%	2.8%	54.8%
Sud-Ouest	0%	0.7%	3.3%	3.3%	92.8%
<b>Rural</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>	<b>49.6%</b>

## What is driving food insecurity?

### Outdated agricultural practices and rural poverty

According to the last governmental household survey (2007), more than half of the rural population is poor and has difficulty meeting its basic needs (food, health, education, housing), with peaks as high as 63% in the northern part of the country.

Rural food insecure households are failing to produce the quantity and diversity of food required to feed themselves throughout the year. Their stocks last about seven months forcing them to rely on markets for the rest of the year.

Despite the presence of agri-businesses, smallholder subsistence farming characterized by scant use of inputs and traditional cultivation techniques prevail. About 30% of households cultivate less than one hectare and 63% less than two. About 43% of rural households use no inputs, such as fertilizer, because of lack of availability or their inability to access them. The proportions are highest in Adamoua (73%), the East (75%), the Littoral (67%) and South (87%).

Households lack storage facilities which forces them to sell their produce immediately post harvest and to borrow when interest rates are highest during the dry season. Only 30% of villages having a granary allowing them to store and manage stocks.

About 38% of farming households cultivate cash crops, which makes them less prone to food

insecurity. But most find it impossible to access the credit they need to invest in their land. Micro credit is only available in a fifth of villages.

What's more rural Cameroon is suffering as a result of the exodus to urban areas where more than half the population now lives. Almost a quarter of rural households have a member who has emigrated for work or schooling in the last year. This contributes to the general ageing of the rural population, hindering development in the agriculture sector.

### Poor transport network and malfunctioning markets

The majority of villages are hard to reach because of poor roads conditions, particularly during the rainy season. Just 18% of villages are connected by a hard top road and 66% by non bitumen track, though the situation is worse in the Extreme North where 63% of villagers have to walk for more than an hour to reach the nearest hard road. More than half of villages are completely cut off during the rainy season (from June to September), making general markets completely inaccessible for about a month and a half each year.

The poor road infrastructure also prevents access to schools and health services and hinders the proper functioning of markets. In almost a third of rural villages the level of provisions is considered to be at best limited or poor, according to the survey.

Shops/stalls are always understocked and sanitation is often very poor. Stallholders struggle to get credit/finance to develop their businesses and are subjected to numerous formal and informal taxes which they generally pass on to the buyer.

With deficient roads and market infrastructure, households encounter difficulties selling their products and are in no position to buy and sell at the optimal time for them. Poor roads also inflate market prices because of the increased cost of transport which fluctuates according to the state of the roads and the season.

### **Dependency on international markets and household vulnerability to high food prices**

Agricultural production has increased modestly in the last years, but the country increasingly depends on food imports (25% of total cereal consumption) to meet the requirements of its rapidly growing population. The country imports all the wheat it consumes and about 80% of the rice, spending 550 billion CFA Francs on food imports in 2009 – up sevenfold since 1994. It also imports oil, milk, sugar and fish. The production deficit of palm oil was in the region of 100,000 tonnes in 2010 while the maize deficit has increased tenfold in the last five years to 300,000 tonnes.

Food prices still remain much higher than before the price crisis of 2008. Compared with the last five year average, maize and cassava increased by 18%, rice by 33% and plantain by 39%.<sup>1</sup> However, drastic governmental measures adopted after the crisis managed to bring food inflation down to an estimated 1.2% in 2010.

Nonetheless food price hikes remain the main shock experienced by urban households, who buy more than 90% of the food they consume.

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1. Cameroun Ministry of Agriculture.



Photo: Jane Howard

Food insecure households spend almost half of their total household bills on buying food so even a slight increase is immediately felt by them.

In rural areas, households buy about 63% of the food they consume, mainly rice, wheat, fish, oil, sugar and other products that they don't produce. They are slightly less vulnerable to high food prices compared with urban households as they can partly rely on their own production.

### **Recurring natural adversities**

The North, which is characterized by an agro-ecological Sahelian climate, has experienced recurrent shocks in the last years, including droughts in 2004 and 2009, floods in 2009 and a cholera epidemic in 2010.

In 2010, the West suffered drought, crop disease and the infestation of one its main staples, taro, which spread to the Littoral.

### **Low education levels**

Households whose head has a low education level are more likely to be food insecure.<sup>2</sup> Daughters in food insecure households have much lower school attendance rates (68% in rural food insecure households vs 82% in food secure households).

With the objective of providing basic education for all by 2015 the government has made primary education free and obligatory. Schooling levels have reached 83% in rural Cameroon and 91% in the regional capitals, but these statistics mask the huge disparities between the regions. Just 69% have a basic education in the North and 74% in the Extreme North, with pupils prevented from attending because of costs, distance to walk to school or because they are needed to work.

What's more school infrastructure is rudimentary at best. Just 3% have a canteen, 20% access to drinking water, 5% electricity and less than half have latrines. The pupil teacher ratio is extremely high with one teacher for 60 pupils.

### **Illness and lack of health infrastructure**

Poor health is a critical immediate cause of malnutrition in children, with sick children needing more nutrients to fight disease and illness. Diarrhea related disease makes them less able to absorb nutrients. Around 72% of households have at least one household member who has suffered from a non chronic illness in the last year. Just two fifths of villages have a functioning health centre forcing 37% of villagers to walk more than an hour to reach one. 80% of villages have no pharmacy.

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2. The household head did not attend or finish primary school.



## Recommendations for interventions

- 1** Agricultural development is key to ensure the population's future food security. This requires investments to facilitate households' access to fertilizers and pesticides, and more modern tools.
- 2** Investments to build storage facilities will help households better manage their stocks and meet their food requirements during the lean season.
- 3** The strengthening of the road and bridges network will enhance food availability in villages and farmers' marketing opportunities. It will also greatly facilitate households' access to health and education infrastructure. Targeted food or cash-for-work schemes can contribute to the rehabilitation of damaged roads and bridges and their maintenance.
- 4** Facilitating better access to credit for farmers and traders would stimulate production and ensure better availability in markets.
- 5** School feeding programmes should continue and be extended where school attendance rates are still the lowest, in particular for girls, and where school dropout is still problematic.
- 6** Continuing food price monitoring is crucial at a time of international market turbulence and pressures from growing regional demand.
- 7** The North remains the priority area for interventions as it has the worst indicators in terms of food security, poverty, access to health, education and water.



Photo: Jane Howard



**For questions, please contact**

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