FSIN Membership

The FSIN is a network of technical experts and information managers from lead food security stakeholders. The FSIN seeks to improve information systems by facilitating information flow, harmonizing assessment activities and managing a coordinated Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS). To date there are 30 members of the FSIN, including UN agencies, international and local NGOs and CBOs.

For more information on the FSIN go to: http://www.fsinmyanmar.net

Food Security Monitoring Methodology

The Food Security Information Network (FSIN) has developed a first of its kind Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) for Myanmar. The FSMS is a simple, cost-effective system, tailored specifically to Myanmar. Monitoring is conducted three times per year (Pre-Monsoon, Mid-Monsoon and Post-Monsoon) covering over 50 townships to date.

The FSIN uses a joint approach of limited quantitative data collection, followed by a rigorous and systematic qualitative review of the food security situation. The quantitative data collection is sentinel site-based, with FSIN partners collecting information in monitored townships on core, internationally recognized indicators of food security (including the Household Hunger Scale, the Household Dietary Diversity Score, the Reduced Coping Strategies Index, etc). Data collected is analyzed using an IPC-type (Integrated Phase Classification) analytical framework and the information gleaned is intended to provide an initial indication of the situation in the townships monitored.

The qualitative review utilizes secondary information (from surveys, government reporting systems, etc) as well as the knowledge and expertise of field staff and other local actors to better understand how well the sentinel site data reflects the overall situation in the township. After this review, the totality of the evidence is used to classify the food security situation in each monitored township. Classifications are made at regional workshops (Magway, Hakha, Lashio, Taunggyi, Sittwe and Maungdaw) where FSIN members, other local stakeholders as well as local government departments (Agriculture, Health, etc) are able to share information and gain consensus as to the food security situation in each township.
2013 PRE MONSOON FOOD SECURITY CLASSIFICATIONS

Food Security Monitoring System - Pre-Monsoon food security situation

Legend
- Attempted Classification but insufficient data

Food Security Classification
- Generally Food Secure
- Moderately Food Insecure
- Highly Food Insecure
- Severe Situation
- Emergency situation

Recent Shocks
- Conflict
- Land Slide
- Rat infestation

Projection: Geographic Lat/Long
Datum: WGS 84
Creation Date: 11 - 9 - 2013
Source: WFP and Partners
FOOD SECURITY OUTLOOK

The food security situation has remained largely stable since the post-monsoon monitoring round at the end of 2012, with improvements observed in certain key indicators and deteriorations observed in others. Generally, trends in food stocks, dietary diversity and hunger followed expected patterns, showing only marginal changes in the food security situation. An analysis of household debts, however, shows that the lean season is quickly approaching, with many households already forced to take on additional debts, the majority of which was used to purchase food. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Household food stocks have declined somewhat since the post-harvest period, dropping from slightly more than 2.5 months, on average, in December 2012 to just above 1.5 months in May/June 2013. This is to be expected as household food stocks are typically at their highest immediately following the monsoon paddy harvest. The FSIN expects food stocks to continue to decline as the lean season progresses, with evidence from the 2012 mid monsoon monitoring round suggesting stocks could be as low as 3 weeks, on average, by August.

It is important to note, however, that the average length of food stocks does not uniformly define the food gap across the country, as food stocks vary significantly across livelihood groups. Casual labourers and fishermen, for instance, store very small quantities of staple foods compared to paddy and maize growers.

In the Dry Zone, for example, families depending on casual labour often purchase rice on a daily basis. This explains the consistently low food stocks observed in the Dry Zone year round and contrasts with food stocks in Chin State, for instance, which vary according to the cropping season (see figure 1). Maintenance of food stocks, of course, is an important protective factor for households, as those with capacities to store staple foods are less reliant on food purchases and are thus less impacted by marketplace instability and price shocks.

While household food stocks declined since the last monitoring round, dietary patterns seemed to improve slightly. Overall, the percentage of monitored households with inadequate diets fell by 5 percentage points, from 30% in December/January to just under 25% in May/June. As the monsoon season continues, however, the FSIN expects overall household dietary quality to progressively worsen. This is largely due to the continued decline of food stocks, dwindling financial resources (as money is spent to procure inputs, cover agricultural labour costs, etc) and higher staple food prices (given increased demand, lower availability and increased transportation costs). Casual labourers and those without access to land are likely to be most affected.

Notably, in 2012, the FSIN observed a marked increase in vegetable consumption from the pre-monsoon to monsoon monitoring rounds. As consumption of vegetables has important implications on child nutritional status, the FSIN will be monitoring this throughout the monsoon season to determine whether similar patterns are observed in 2013.

Finally, reported levels of hunger (from the household hunger scale) remained stable since the post-monsoon monitoring round, with less than 5% of households reporting either moderate or severe hunger. Again, this is expected to worsen over the coming monsoon season, with evidence from the monsoon round in 2012 suggesting that significant deteriorations are possible by August. Increases in hunger are very much connected to the factors discussed above. As staple food stocks dwindle, prices for basic commodities increase, making it harder for households to access food. Difficulty accessing food often leads to altered consumption patterns with households not only eating less diverse food but also cutting portion sizes, all of which eventually leads to hunger.
IN FOCUS: POVERTY AND DEBTS

In 2013, the FSIN included modules on poverty and debts within the sentinel site surveillance system. To measure poverty, the FSIN collected UNDP’s poverty scorecard which allowed direct comparisons of poverty levels across monitored areas. The FSIN also included a section on debts which was intended to better understand how debts impact the rural economy of Myanmar and to clarify the role debt cycles play in either causing or mitigating food insecurity.

Poverty findings revealed similar patterns to those seen in the 2009/2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA). Overall, monitored areas in Chin and Rakhine States showed the highest probabilities for poverty and food poverty while monitored areas in Yangon and Ayeryarwaddy Regions showed the lowest.

Debt burdens showed different patterns, with the highest percentage of households with debts observed in monitored areas of Yangon and Bago Regions (see Figure 4). Debt burdens were also high, however, in monitored areas of Chin and Rakhine State as well as the Dry Zone. Overall, over three-quarters of monitored households reported debts while close to two-thirds reported taking on new debts within the three months preceding the monitoring round.

Examining the reason for taking on debts, findings indicate that more than 50% of recent debts were taken in order to purchase food items. This suggests that a significant percentage of households are either currently experiencing difficulties accessing food or are anticipating difficulties accessing food in the near future, reflecting the approaching lean season. Aside from food purchases, approximately 15% of monitored households reported taking on debts to purchase agricultural inputs. This is due to the coming monsoon cropping season which requires that farmers invest to cover cultivation expenses. Slightly more than one-tenth of households also reported taking on debts for health expenditures. This, too, is not a surprise as there are usually significant outbreaks of seasonal diseases at the beginning of the rainy season. Notably, information on overall debt burdens indicates that current debt loads are high, with evidence pointing to the fact that it would take the equivalent of close to 100 days of casual work, on average, for households to reimburse existing debts with cash.

A look at the relationship between poverty and debts revealed positive correlations, with households in high poverty areas more likely to report debts. Correlations were strongest between poverty and debt when debt was used to purchase food items rather than to cover other costs (agricultural inputs, schooling, health, etc). Notably, households who acquired debts in order to cover food costs showed poorer food consumption patterns, with households consuming less of each food group (with the exception of cereals) and close to 40% reporting inadequate diets. By contrast, fewer than one-third of households with no debts or debts used to purchase non-food items reported inadequate diets.

Debts taken to obtain food items were mainly directed at ensuring access to rice, with debt rarely taken to purchase any other food items. In addition, households which cultivated rice appeared less likely to take on debts for food items, confirming the importance of staple crop production in maintaining household food security status.
RAKHINE STATE

Significant food insecurity was observed in northern Rakhine State, with both Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships classified as highly food insecure. Levels of dietary inadequacy, hunger and daily use of food-based coping, however, suggested that both townships could be transitioning towards more severe levels of food insecurity. Recent nutrition screenings conducted in urban and peri-urban areas of Maungdaw and Buthidaung provided further evidence of this, as both screenings indicated that malnutrition levels are likely exceeding WHO emergency thresholds in both townships. Additionally, Maungdaw was amongst the few monitored townships across the country where a high prevalence of begging (1.2 days per week on average) was observed.

In central Rakhine, more moderate levels of food insecurity were observed. In fact, since the last round, improvements were seen in Pauktaw township, largely driven by significant reductions in the percent with inadequate diets. This may suggest that rural areas of Pauktaw are indeed beginning to re-establish livelihoods, despite the continued inter-communal tensions in the area. As the FSIN monitoring could not be conducted in Sittwe or Kyaukpyu townships, no food security classification could be provided. However, different sources of information confirm that the overall situation in the IDPs camps remains precarious with approximately 130,000 IDPs depending on external assistance to cover basic food needs, with reports of aid recipients selling part of their rations to cover other unmet basic needs. With heavy rains, the health and sanitation condition of camps is likely to worsen. Amongst non-displaced populations, insecurity continues to impact movements and livelihoods. Nevertheless, initiatives are ongoing to bolster livelihoods and increase agricultural production. The Government is providing agriculture and farming inputs for communities, with the hope that that this provision of inputs will also create a momentum for communities to start working together again.

AYEYARWADY, BAGO, YANGON REGIONS

Ngapudaw and Labutta townships in Ayeryarwady Region were found to be generally food secure, an improvement compared to the post-monsoon monitoring round with no indicators pointing toward an immediate degradation of this status. Higher levels of food insecurity, however, were found in the adjacent Mawlamyinegyun township, with this area classified as moderately food insecure. Here, food insecurity was significant enough to force households to limit the amount and variety of food items consumed, with a subset of the population (<20%) consequently reporting hunger. This combination of high coping and elevated reports of hunger may indicate that a percentage of vulnerable households are transitioning towards more severe levels of food insecurity as a result of declining food stocks and fragmented access to income generating opportunities.

Monitored areas in Yangon and Bago Regions were also found to be moderately food insecure. In Thegon township in Bago, use of food-based coping mechanisms was particularly high as well, with more than 50% of households reporting this.
DRY ZONE

Townships monitored throughout the Dry Zone were largely classified as moderately food insecure, though Pauk, Pakokku, Chauk, Yenganyaung and Ngape were classified as highly food insecure. Notably, the food security situation in Natmauk and Yesagyo townships improved since the last monitoring round. Improvements were largely driven by increases in household food stocks and declines in percentages reporting hunger, inadequate diets and use of daily food-based coping strategies. Household purchasing power also improved, suggesting better income generating opportunities now than in the post-monsoon period.

As mentioned previously, Pauk and Pakokku townships remained highly food insecure, with no overall changes from the last monitoring round. Both areas continue to report limited food stocks and high levels of dietary inadequacy. Pauk, in particular also showed relatively high percentages of households using daily food-based coping mechanisms. This is a potential warning sign that the food security situation may be deteriorating. Ngape township presented similar patterns to those observed in Pauk and Pakoku with limited food stocks (18 days on average), weak purchasing power (close to 100% of the income required to purchase a basic food basket) and a heavy reliance on food-based coping mechanisms.

Finally, monitored areas throughout the Dry Zone reported elevated rates of seasonal migration, suggesting continued food stress and confirming that seasonal migration is an important way in which households are able to cover basic needs.

CHIN STATE

The food security situation has not changed significantly since the last monitoring round, with moderate levels of food insecurity observed in most townships and high levels of food insecurity persisting in Thantlang and Tedim townships. The only change in food security status was observed in Tonzag township, where the situation in rural areas improved enough to lower the classification from highly to moderately food insecure.

Continued high levels of food insecurity in Thantlang and Tedim are a result of the significant crop failures experienced in the 2012 monsoon season, which left many communities without adequate food stocks to last them to the next harvest. As food stocks decline further, a significant percentage of monitored households have begun to limit the amount and variety of food items consumed. This is a marked change since the post monsoon monitoring round and indicates a potential for further deterioration as the lean season progresses.

Dietary patterns remain poor throughout Chin, with majorities reporting inadequate diets regardless of township. Hunger, however, was reported only in Paletwa Township. Notably, a food security and nutrition survey was conducted in March by ACF and WFP in Paletwa. Overall, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates are low (3%) while stunting rates remained quite high (50%).
SHAN STATE

While the food security situation in southern Shan remained quite stable since the post-monsoon monitoring round, the situation in northern Shan was more fluid, with food insecurity increasing in Kutkai, Manton and Namtu townships (from moderately to highly food insecure) and declining in Lashio (from highly to moderately food insecure).

In southern Shan State, Hopong, Hsihseng and Phekon townships remained moderately food insecure. Overall, since the post monsoon monitoring round, food stocks have declined but purchasing power has improved, as work opportunities (thus incomes) increase significantly during the planting season. A subset of the population in Hsihseng and Phekon, however, continue to report hunger and heavy reliance on food-based coping mechanisms, which suggests that some households are having increased difficulty accessing food.

In northern Shan State, deteriorations in food security status in Kutkai, Manton and Namtu were mainly due to ongoing insecurity in the area, leaving affected households unable to cover basic food needs. To cope with this, households have been forced to alter consumption patterns, reducing not only the amount of food consumed but also the variety. Examined by township, almost 50% of monitored households in Kutkai reported altering consumption patterns on a daily basis while about one-quarter did so in Namtu. In Kutkai, altered consumption patterns were accompanied by increases in hunger, with close to 15% of monitored households reporting hunger in the current monitoring round. While the monsoon cropping season will provide increased job opportunities in the near-term, food stocks will continue to decline as the lean season progresses and hazards related to both the rainy season and the ongoing conflict are expected to result in further declines in food security status over the coming few months.

KAYAH, KAYIN STATES

Since the last monitoring round, the food security situation in the monitored townships of Kayin and Kayah States has remained stable. Overall, the situation can be described as moderately food insecure with some improvements observed in Demoso township of Kayah State. Although monitoring data was not collected in the townships of Loikaw and Bawlakhe, information from actors operational in these areas does not suggest any significant deterioration since the last round. In June, ACF and WFP conducted a nutrition survey in 3 townships of Loikaw district (Loikaw, Demoso and Hpruso townships). Results from the data collected indicate a prevalence of acute malnutrition of 3.2% (below the WHO and NCHS emergency cutoffs), stunting levels (an indicator of chronic malnutrition) at 46.2%, and severe stunting at 13.8%. Such a situation may be a result of a combination of factors, however it particularly points to inadequate diets over an extended period of time.

In 2013, Kawkareik and Hlaingbwe in Kayin State were included in the monitoring for the first time. Both townships showed only moderate levels of food insecurity.
2012 POST MONSOON FOOD SECURITY CLASSIFICATIONS

Food Security Monitoring System - December 2012 Classifications (FSIN)

Legend
- Attempted classification but insufficient data
- Food security classification
  - Generally Food Secure
  - Moderately Food Insecure
  - Highly Food Insecure
  - Severe Situation
  - Emergency situation
- Recent shocks
  - Conflicts/Communal violence/Displacements
  - Water shortages/late rains

Projection: Geographic LatLon
Datum: WGS 84
Creation Date: 15 - Feb - 2013
Source: WFP and Partners