KOHISTAN DISTRICT (FARYAB) — CONFLICT RAPID ASSESSMENT

mVAM AFGHANISTAN - EMERGENCY FLASH UPDATE #3 23 NOVEMBER 2016

KEY MESSAGES
- Access to Kohistan district has been severely constrained for the past four months due to insecurity, and has further deteriorated following heavy snowfall in the past five days. The majority of people are currently unable to go to work, and most traders are unable to bring food to the local market.
- Food prices have increased significantly in the past month, and food shortages are widely reported — in particular perishables (vegetables, meat and dairy), but also grains and pulses.
- Households’ access to food is constrained both physically and economically: there is not enough food on the local market to meet the demand, and the little that is available is unaffordable for most households.

ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND
In response to reports of deteriorating access in Kohistan district (Faryab province), due a combination of insecurity and recent snowfall, WFP launched a rapid phone survey on 23 November 2016. The aim was to get a quick snapshot of the food security and access situation in the district, to assess the need for an immediate humanitarian intervention.

Kohistan district has an estimated population of 54,800 (CSO 2015/16 est.), of which 16% (8,800 people) are estimated to be chronically food insecure (WFP/ICA analysis 2016).

SECURITY AND ACCESS
Respondents indicated that the road linking Kohistan district to the provincial capital of Maimana has been controlled by Taliban forces for the past four months, and that the security situation has gotten worse in the past month. Access has further deteriorated in the past four to five days due to heavy snowfall, with road transport in and out of the district now almost entirely blocked. Six of the ten people interviewed said traders were not able to bring food in at all due to insecurity (and, more recently, snowfall), while the remaining four said that some land transport through alternative routes was still possible, but on a very limited scale.

FOOD SHORTAGES AND MARKET FUNCTIONALITY
There are two markets in the district: Kolash and Bandar. Kolash market is extremely insecure, and most stalls are closed. Bandar market is still open and accessible by households, but traders have very little to sell and prices are extremely high (see next section). All the respondents reported food shortages, including some shortages of grains and pulses (wheat flour, rice, lentils/beans). While a few cases of shortages of perishable commodities such as fresh vegetables and chicken have been reported in previous mVAM surveys (such as the rapid conflict assessments in Kunduz and Farah), this is the first time we get reports of grain shortages.
Respondents consistently reported that food prices had gone up significantly in the past month, with insecurity hindering traders from bringing food to the district markets. Heavy snowfall in the past few days has further reduced supply, leading to a sharp increase in prices. Current prices of wheat flour in Kohistan are 54% higher than in the Maimana provincial market—located less than 70 km away—while pulse prices are a staggering 70% higher.

The terms of trade (ToT) between wheat flour and casual labor is a proxy indicator for household purchasing power, which shows the quantity of wheat flour that can be purchased with the wage earned from one day of casual unskilled labor. Not surprisingly, given the high wheat prices, the ToT in Kohistan (8kg/ work day) was lower than in the provincial Maimana market (9kg/ day) and than the national average (11kg/ day) over the same time period. This is particularly worrying given the scarcity of casual work opportunities at the moment: not only are households unable to find work, but when they do, the income earned buys them less food than it would in other parts of the country.

All respondents reported that people in the district were currently unable to go to work, and that there were no casual labour opportunities available. While the lack of casual labour opportunities in this season can be explained by the normal agricultural calendar, the inability to go to other workplaces appears to be due to conflict.

When asked how serious the food security situation in the district was, respondents reported that better-off households, who own land and produce their own grains, had about one month’s worth of stock remaining from the previous harvest. However, the situation amongst poorer households, who mostly work as wage laborers and buy most of their food from the market, is extremely worrying. Given food shortages and high prices in the local market, households are facing double access constraints: physical and economic. There is not enough food on the local markets to meet demand, and the little that is available is unaffordable for most households.