



# RAPPORT MENSUEL SUR LA SECURITE ALIMEN- TAIRE AU RWANDA



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NAGRI/U  
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## Summary

Unseasonably dry conditions occurred over southern and eastern Rwanda in February and early March 2003. These are the same areas previously reported to have pockets of food insecurity. Consequently, WFP-VAM, FEWS NET Rwanda and government partners in the field conducted in early March a joint rapid assessment in these areas to determine the magnitude of food insecurity. The mission found that most household coping strategies (e.g. casual work and informal cross-border trade) were working well and that the situation would improve if rains were well established by mid-march. The exact number of at risk population could not be readily estimated, mainly because it was critically dependent on the expected rains. Since then, rains came in mid-March and food insecurity eased across the country. However, the assessment mission recommends that the government, UN agencies and donors to strengthen alternative aid programs such as labor intensive public works and long-term development projects in chronically vulnerable areas in order to prevent severe food crises in the future. FEWS NET, WFP and other partners will closely monitor food insecurity trends, particularly in zones where some food shortage is already reported.

The recent rainfall forecast recently released by meteorologists the March-May 2003 period is rather favorable for Rwanda, which is a cause for optimism for food security in the second half of the year. According to that forecast, the western and eastern halves of Rwanda have respectively 75% and 65% chances of receiving normal or above normal rainfalls. The eastern half includes Kibungo and Umutara Provinces where pockets of food insecurity already exist. FEWS NET, WFP and other partners will keep on closely monitoring food insecurity trends in the country, particularly in those zones at higher risks.

## Résumé

Il a fait anormalement sec au Rwanda au cours du mois de février et de la première moitié de mars 2003, particulièrement au sud et à l'est du pays. L'unité VAM du PAM, FEWS NET et des partenaires gouvernementaux de terrain ont dès lors effectué début mars une mission d'évaluation rapide dans cette partie du pays, d'autant plus que la situation semblait se détériorer dans les poches d'insécurité alimentaires existantes. La mission a trouvé que les stratégies d'adaptation (travaux temporaires dans les projets, commerce transfrontalier informel) utilisées par les ménages vulnérables marchaient bien et que la situation alimentaire allait s'améliorer si les pluies tombaient à la mi-mars. L'estimation du nombre exact de personnes les plus exposées au risque de la faim n'a pas été bien établie, du fait que ce nombre allait sur-

tout dépendre des pluies. Depuis, les pluies sont effectivement arrivées à la mi-mars et l'insécurité alimentaire s'est atténuée à travers le pays. La mission recommande toutefois que le gouvernement et les bailleurs de fonds renforcent des programmes alternatifs d'assistance tels que les programmes de haute intensité de main-d'œuvre et les projets de développement à long terme dans les régions les plus vulnérables afin de prévenir de graves crises alimentaires à l'avenir.

Les météorologues ont récemment prédit que les pluies seraient plutôt favorables au Rwanda pour la période de mars à mai 2003, ce qui est une source d'optimisme pour la sécurité alimentaire de la seconde moitié de l'année. Selon ces prévisions, l'ouest et l'est du Rwanda ont respectivement 75% et 65% de chances d'avoir des pluies normales ou plus élevées. L'est du pays inclut les provinces de Kibungo et d'Umutara dans lesquels des poches d'insécurité alimentaire existaient déjà. FEWS NET, le PAM et d'autres partenaires vont suivre de près l'évolution de la situation dans le pays, particulièrement dans les zones les plus exposées à l'insécurité alimentaire.

## 1. Review of Diminishing, Continuous and Emerging Food Crises

After the joint crop assessment mission, FEWS NET and the WFP-VAM unit visited the zones believed to have had most production shortfalls in order to confirm their status and possibly recommend appropriate assistance. Visits were thus made to Bugesera Region of Kigali Rural Province and to Kibungo and Umutara Provinces in early March. Though no mission went to Kibuye Province, the information collected from key informant in the province allowed FEWS NET and WFP-VAM to derive a good general picture of the situation there. The rainfall also improved since the second dekad of March (see Figure 1). According to the findings of these investigations and following the new rainfall pattern, the moderate food crises existing in different provinces have generally eased and no new ones seem ap-

### 1.1. Diminishing Food Crises

To verify the worrying situation which some partners in the field were reporting, FEWS NET/WFP-VAM and CARITAS visited **Bugesera Region** (Kigali Rural Province) on March 5<sup>th</sup>. The mission found that even in areas of Gashora and Nyamata Districts where practically no beans had been harvested last season, due to late start and/or severe rainfall shortage, the good supply of cassava was providing food and income to cover daily caloric requirements. It seems, however, that farmers selling cassava are not buying sufficient quantities of beans to cover proteins requirements as well. Some sweet potatoes had been planted and cuttings were expected to be more available with rains to allow even more widespread planting. Furthermore, land had been prepared and farmers were ready to plant beans as soon as they would get rain. The

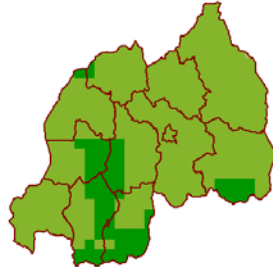
early planted sorghum that was wilting at the time of the visit has reportedly recovered with the recent rains. Therefore, the food crisis, which was moderate and affected only parts of the region, is reducing. In fact, the farmers interviewed were not afraid of a sudden food crisis striking now, but rather of what they felt as the beginning of a slow crisis process intensifying with each failed season and likely to result in a fully-fledged crisis sometime in 2004.

**Figure 1: Recent Satellite Rainfall Estimates**

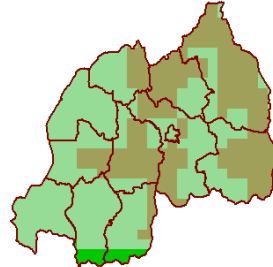
Feb 1-10



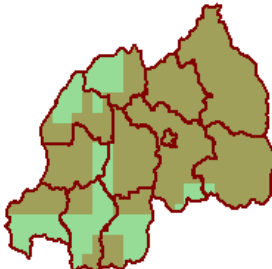
Feb 11-20



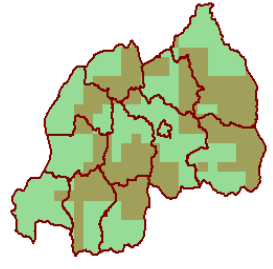
Feb 21-28



March 1-10



March 11-20



#### Legend

- No rain
- Very low rain
- Low rain
- Good rain
- Heavy rain

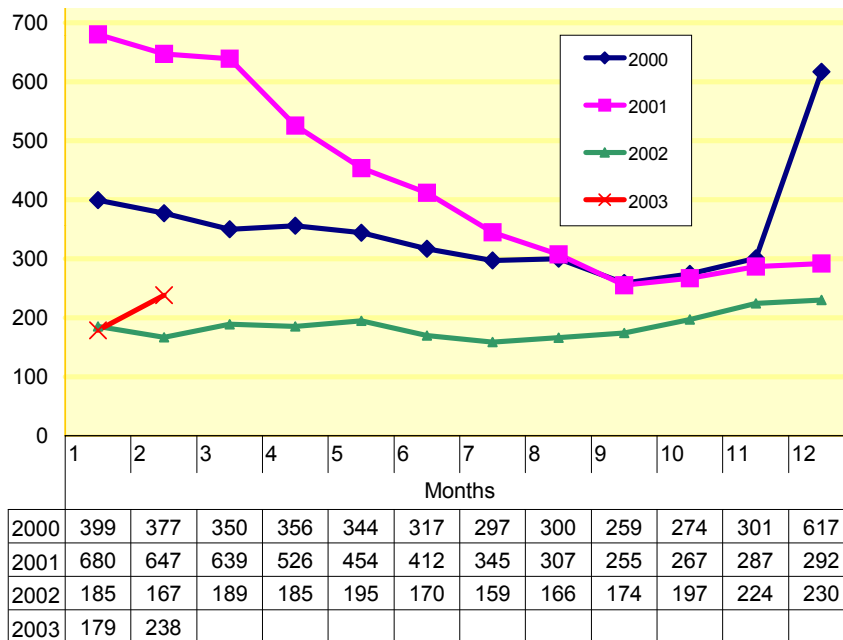
Note: Remotely sensed estimates are *estimates* and actual ground measurements may vary.

FEWS NET, March 03

pearing at this time.

This process last happened in 2000-2001. The apparent upward trend of

**Figure 2: Number of Malnourished Children under 3 years of Age Registered in Rilima Nutritional Center, Gashora District**



Source: Rilima Nutritional Center, March 2003

malnutrition rates (see Figure 2) which started in February 2003 in Rilima, Gashora District, gives credence to their fear, though it remains to be seen whether this trend will continue or not. According to the staff of Rilima Nutritional Center, the high rates of infant malnutrition depicted in this figure result from a combination of factors including production shortfall (especially of beans and cereals, more nutritious than cassava), inadequate knowledge of appropriate diet, diseases and, above all, high levels of poverty.

In the areas of **Kibungo and Umutara Provinces** where a severe rainfall shortage during the last agricultural season had negatively affected production, a food crisis was emerging in early March. At the time of the visit (11 to 13<sup>th</sup> March), sorghum and beans had not been planted or were wilting. However, the mission noted that all along households had been using efficient coping strategies (farm and non-farm labor in both provinces, especially in development projects (mainly in Umutara),

cross-border trade (with Tanzania, mainly in Kibungo), and fishing (vulnerable areas of Kibungo Province) and that these coping strategies were far from exhausted. Since then, the return of rains during the second week of March significantly improved the situation and the new consensus is that food security will be fine if the rainfall remains favorable throughout the season. Despite this

outlook, food security

professionals will closely monitor the zones at risk, especially since the current rainfall forecast for Kibungo and in Umutara Provinces is moderately pessimistic (see section 2.3 for further details).

It is worth noting that the recommendation made in the last bulletin to provide potatoes cuttings, while still holding, is no longer urgent due to the favorable impact of the recent rains. Before the actual start of season, the WFP field office of Kibungo in collaboration with provincial authorities had estimated the number of people vulnerable to food insecurity as a result of last season's rainfall shortage at about 50,000. It is now believed that this number should be revised downwards to about 30,000. After interviewing some farmers of the areas considered most vulnerable, and seen how well they were coping, the WFP-VAM/FEWS NET rapid assessment team believes that this last number should be considered as an upper limit

and apply to Kibungo and Umutara provinces combined.

The food crisis of Rutsiro, Itabire and Budaha Districts of **Kibuye Province**, which the last bulletins had been highlighting, has also eased. Due to the steady rainfall occurring in the western part of the country since January 2003, Rutsiro District is no longer considered food insecure during this consumption period (January-July 2003). The respite caused by the return of rains is most welcome in Kibuye Province because the food for work (FFW) activities that had been recommended will not take place in the end because globally WFP faces a serious food shortage. There are competing demands for food and WFP has to respond on a priority basis to the severe food crisis in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. WFP Rwanda anticipating difficult times ahead in resource sourcing is now approving and starting very few new FFW projects. This certainly will help safeguard the implementation of ongoing programs such as existing FFW programs, supplementary feeding at nutritional centers (though delivery, monitoring and evaluation need to be improved in certain centers), school feeding and assistance to HIV/AIDS-affected households. However, where need for new food assistance will arise, the Government in collaboration with UN agencies and donors should more vigorously promote programs such as labor intensive public works, micro-credit schemes, animal husbandry as alternatives to food aid.

The high altitude areas of Kibuye Province, characterized by infertile and erosion-prone soils, require long term solutions (animal restocking, modernization of agriculture, non-farm labor opportunities, etc.) to escape from chronic and seasonal food insecurity. This is also

true for other chronically food insecure regions of the country.

## **1.2. Continuing Food Crises**

One clear sign of an enduring food availability and access problem is the very high and still increasing price of sweet potatoes. This is also drawing upwards the price of substitute commodities such as cassava and cassava flour. At nearly 50 RWF per kilo, the current price of sweet potatoes is the highest of the last two years. According to official database, sweet potatoes account for about 25% of the food calorie supply in Rwanda. They reportedly form a higher share of the diet of the rural poor. Its high price makes it less accessible to this category of the population and makes it even more food insecure.

Despite the easing of the food crisis in Umutara, Kibungo and Kigali Rural Provinces, pockets of food insecurity still remain in those areas. According to key informants, the chronically vulnerable areas of Gikongoro and Butare Provinces also have pockets of moderate food insecurity. Due to the resumption of rains and to a rapidly changing situation, it has not been possible for the FEWS NET/WFP-VAM mission to come up with an estimate of the number of vulnerable population. However, there is good consensus about the areas requiring closest monitoring (see Figure 3) to ensure that outside assistance be recommended, if needed, and hopefully provided in time before local coping strategies are exhausted. The indicators that will be used to monitor food insecurity in those areas will include rainfall, prices, malnutrition rates and temporary migration of the active members to other regions in search of work.

Due to the recent rains, gradual availability of sweet potato cuttings and continuous recourse to normal coping

strategies, there is no emerging food crisis in Rwanda at this time.

## 2. Food Security Conditions and Prospects

### 2.1. Current Food Security Status

The preceding discussion and the opinion of various key informants allows to conclude that food security is good at national level, despite pockets of moderate food insecurity found here and there. Traditional coping strategies and the current food aid programs are adequate to maintain an adequate level of food security till the next harvest expected in July 2003.

### 2.3. Food Security Outlook

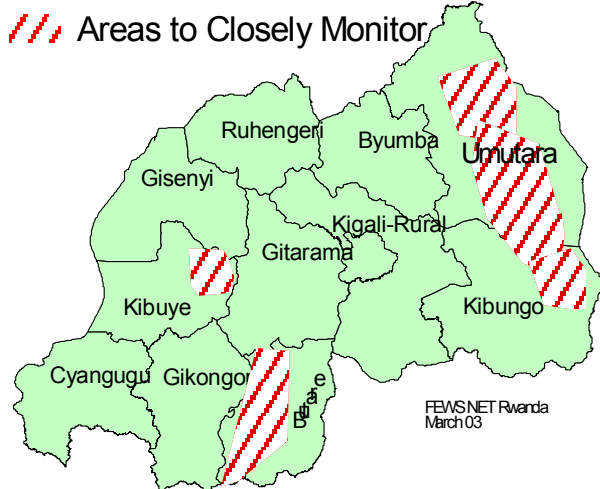
In February and early March, many people were worried about the late start of season 2003B and the decline of sorghum cultivation. The delay of the season was in fact a kind of blessing, as crops were not ready for harvest in December-January due to the very late start of the previous season. Concern-

ing sorghum, some farmers effectively choose to reduce acreage in favor of beans because of

the late start of season. Sorghum is sown from December to February in Rwanda, while beans can be planted throughout March. The acreage of sorghum probably reduced by 25% compared to normal levels, but the reduction is being taken up by beans cultivation. Depending on rainfall, the gains in beans production may therefore compensate for the anticipated shortfalls in sorghum production. If this happens, farmers who wish to consume more sorghum will simply get it on the market by selling some of their excess stock of beans.

By and large, the performance of season 2003 B and the resulting food security status of the second half of the year will be determined by rainfall. If rains are adequate, as the forecast suggests (see next paragraph), the country will be relatively food secure during that period. In case of significant rainfall shortage or poor distribution, some food crisis will be experienced in some parts of the country.

**Figure 3: Localization of Potentially Food Insecure Areas**



Source: Agricultural services in concerned provinces

### The March-May 2003 Rainfall Forecast.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Great Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF 11) which took place in Entebbe from 3 to 5 March 2003 issued the March to May rainfall forecast for the region. Figure 4 summarizes this forecast. For Rwanda, the western part is expected to have 35% chance of receiving higher than normal (i.e. long-term average) rainfall, 40% chance of having normal rainfall and 25% chance of receiving less than normal rainfall. This means 75% chance of having at least normal rainfall. Though forecasts are not always accurate (they were however accurate more often than not over the last 5 years), the current



forecast is very favorable for this part of the country. As the zone normally receives high rainfall quantities, it faces associated high risks of erosion and landslides.

The forecast for the central and eastern parts of the country is not as good. This area includes Mayaga Region in Butare and Gitarama Provinces, Kigali Rural, Kibungo and Umutara Provinces, which had suffered most rainfall shortage during last season. However, with 25%, 40% and 35% probabilities for above, normal and below normal rainfall respectively, there are also good chances (65% probability) of sufficient rainfall.

### **Implications of the Forecast**

According to FEWS NET/USGS' interpretation of the forecast, using the performance of Year 1995 (the year found by meteorologists to have the closest meteorological conditions as today), Rwanda should have normal crop development during the current season. This interpretation was done on a trial basis and should therefore be used with caution.

Based on past experience, the most significant elements of agricultural performance are the actual rainfall distribution and the duration of the season, rather than the total quantity of water received.

Though the distribution and duration of rains are not yet routinely forecasted, some international centers post on the web forecasts for coming weeks and months. According to those forecasts, rains should remain relatively steady up to mid-May, which should be enough for most of the bean crop to mature. This again bodes well for food security up to the end of the year.

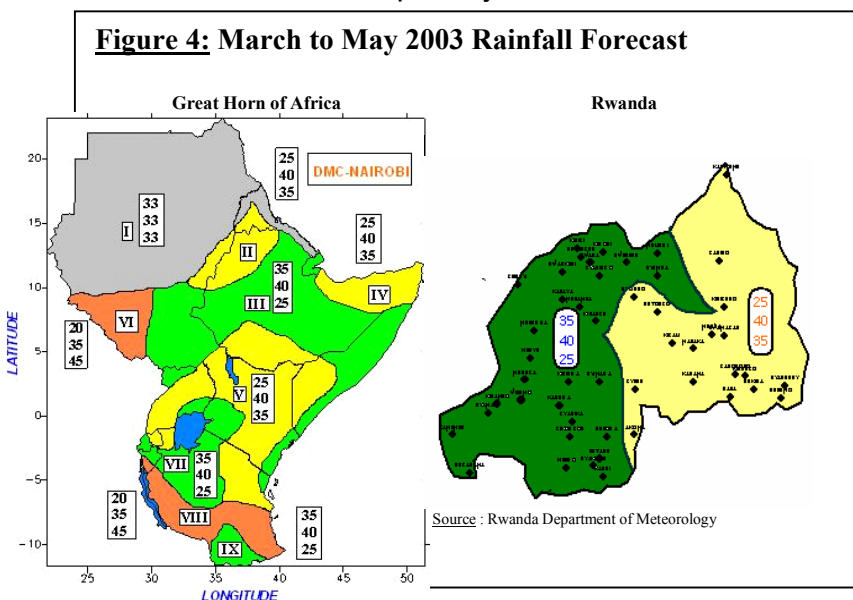
Since outlooks may abruptly change in the course of the season, FEWS NET and its partners will keep on monitoring the actual rainfall and other pertinent hazards for early warning purposes. The central and eastern parts of the country, particularly Kibungo and Umutara Provinces, appear more at risk of yet another rainfall shortage and will be more rigorously monitored.

### **Non-Climatic Hazard Risks**

The following non-climatic risk elements could have a negative impact on food security in Rwanda during the coming months:

1. Increased fighting in Burundi. May 1<sup>st</sup> is the date fixed in the Peace Accord for the transfer of power from the current President to the Vice-president. This transfer appears uncertain and the current wave of fighting may aggravate the civil insecurity in that country, possibly causing an influx of refugees into Rwanda.

2. Tension between Uganda and Rwanda. In the current context, Rwanda felt threatened for its own security in early March, following clashes in Ituri Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between a Congolese rebel faction and Ugandan troops, and cautioned that it could send its forces into the DRC again. Given the distance to the current conflict zone, the war would not have a di-



rect, immediate impact on food security in Rwanda, but it would in the medium and long run by tying up development resources. Also, the thriving cross-border trade of food commodities between Rwanda and Uganda, which plays an important role in food security, would be affected if tension between the two countries remained high. This trade has however proved to be very resilient so far, even in the midst of high tension.

3. The increase of fuel prices. The price of fuel influences the price of food commodities, through transport costs which in turn raise food prices. This reduces access to food and directly impacts and increases vulnerability for the poor in urban areas. Contrary to other farmers, the poor and vulnerable households in rural areas, who are often land and labor-poor, tend to be net buyers of food. They are therefore also negatively affected by rising food prices. The price of oil has increased steadily over the last few months (the price of a liter of fuel at petrol stations increased by about 10% since December 2002, i.e. from 400 to 439 RWF in early March, 2003). The war in Iraq is likely to cause further fuel price increases in the short term, in turn leading to further rises in the price of staple foods.