



FOOD SECURITY REPORT
Lofa County
Voinjama, Kolahun & Foya Districts
March 2005

Funded by ECHO



TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	4
I. OBJECTIVES	4
II. METHODOLOGY	4
KEY FINDINGS: FOYA, KOLAHUN, VOINJAMA DISTRICTS	5
I. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY	5
II. INFRASTRUCTURES AND ACCESSIBILITY	8
1. Housing	8
2. Water and Sanitation	8
3. Health	9
4. Education	9
5. Market	10
6. Accessibility	10
III. LOCAL ECONOMY	11
1. Sources of income	11
2. Expenditures	12
3. Markets and Trade Links	12
IV. AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SITUATION	13
1. Agricultural Production	13
2. Livestock	14
3. Household food consumption	14
V. HUMANITARIAN AID	16
VI. SECURITY	17
CONCLUSION	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2005, the food security assessment conducted by ACF in the districts of Foya, Kolahun and Voinjama in North Lofa County shows that the food security situation of the population remains precarious.

A gradual return of the population is observed in the majority of the communities assessed. Yet the official repatriation process is slow and should be made more effective.

The survey shows that, on average, 43% of the previous population have returned in their communities. Since the repatriation process was long to start, 97% of the “official returnees”¹ surveyed came back to their place of origin without benefiting from any assistance. As of end of March 2005, a total number of 3,255 refugees have been repatriated in Lofa County while the repatriation process of IDPs had not started.

There is a clear risk that many displaced will be repatriated after the farming season for 2005 and that the food insecurity of the population increases.

The gradual increase in the population raises concerns regarding the access to basic social infrastructures. More interventions are needed in terms of water and sanitation, rehabilitation of schools and health posts.

On average, the needs of save drinking water are covered at 8% in the communities assessed. 1/3 of the communities assessed needs to travel more than 4h to access a health post. The schools are slow to be reactivated; they are based in temporary structures and no official teacher is in place.

The lack of shelters and construction materials lead to an overpopulation of the houses. Despite the support of Peace Winds, more support is needed, especially in Kolahun and Foya districts.

¹ Official returnees: displaced officially recognised either as IDPs or refugees.

Regarding the roads network, the road between Voinjama and Kolahun and from Kolahun to Foya is in great need of rehabilitation. The access to these areas will be restricted during the rainy season and the population risks to be isolated.

Household livelihoods resume but economic opportunities remain limited.

Despite the slight resumption of the local economy, the survey found the majority of households is living with less than 1US a day.

The population relies on different sources of income and, on average, 37% of the households do not have more than 1 source of income.

As the households are compelled to largely purchase the food daily consumed, their economic vulnerability is even increased.

The agricultural activities are reactivated but still need support.

In March 2005, the agricultural activities have resumed across the three districts. 85% of the population is involved in agricultural activities. The main cultivations implemented are: vegetables, upland rice and tubers.

The access to farming tools has been greatly facilitated by the distribution organised by ICRC. On average, 67% of the population have benefited from new tools. 81% of the population in the three districts have access to farming tools.

Access to seeds remains more limited as only 17% of the population had accessed rice seeds in the beginning of the year. This situation should evolve following the rice seeds distribution planned by ICRC and the advancement in the agricultural calendar.

Nevertheless, the high level of expected returns will reduce the impact of the seeds distributed and increase the pressure on the food available in the area.

Humanitarian aid and needs

Several NGOs are addressing the needs of the population but this area is still facing difficulties to recover from the damage resulting from the last crisis.

Considering most of the indicators above and the current humanitarian situation in the three districts, more supports to the communities in the form of long term and targeted programmes will better ensured more sustainable food security for the population. Sectors such as rehabilitation of shelters, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, health structures and road rehabilitation are identified as main priorities by the communities.

Humanitarian assistance is provided to majority of the communities assessed, but the needs remain important and could even increase if a massive return of the population would have to happen.

INTRODUCTION

Since September 2003 and the beginning of the peace process in Liberia, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) has implemented a regular surveillance of the food security situation of the populations in Lofa County. The targeted area of intervention focuses on the North of Lofa County, covering the districts of Foya, Kolahun and Voinjama.

The county of Lofa is one of the most affected areas by the last crisis in Liberia. The large number of Internally Displaced Persons and refugees originating from this area and the high level of basic facilities' destruction testify of the damages caused by the war. In March 2005, the food security situation of the populations living in the three districts remains precarious.

This document constitutes the seventh food security assessment report done by ACF in this area. It presents the key indicators related to the food security level of the population living in several communities of the three districts. Subsequently, it does not pretend to make an exhaustive analysis at the district level but aims at giving a global overview of the situation while its also underlines the main trends of it.

I. OBJECTIVES

ACF regular monitoring of the situation and the diffusion of the results aim to facilitate decision makers in better addressing the needs of the population.

The specific objectives are:

- Ø To gather data on the key indicators influencing the food security level of the population
- Ø To evaluate the food security situation of the population
- Ø To formulate recommendations towards the humanitarian community.

II. METHODOLOGY

Ü Data collection

A team of four mobile food security officers conducted the assessments in the field from the 2nd to the 25th of March. Qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through different techniques and tools at three levels:

a) The rural community

The communities assessed are randomly selected. A total of 12 communities representing a total population of 6,090 inhabitants has participated to the assessment in the three districts.

Table 1: number of communities assessed per district and population

Districts	# of communities	Population
Foya	4	2640
Kolahun	4	1714
Voinjama	4	1736

The data gathered were obtained through "focus group discussions". The key informants of the community (chief, elders, women, youth, villagers, etc.) are invited to an open discussion and provide general information on the food security situation of the community.

b) The household

In order to gather more specific and in-depth information on the food security level of the populations, some household interviews are conducted in each community assessed. The households participating to the semi-structured interviews are randomly selected. A total of 89 households representing 756 individuals has been interviewed in the three districts.

Table 2: number of households interviewed per district and individuals

Districts	# of households	Individuals
Foya	32	257
Kolahun	30	244
Voinjama	27	255

c) The market

The main market places of the area were assessed in order to monitor the prices and the availability of the basic food and non-food items. Semi-direct interviews are conducted with several marketers. In March 2005, a total of 3 markets have been monitored.

ü Data Analysis

On the field, the team discusses the data collected on a daily bases to confirm its validity by cross-checking the sources. When a town or district is being assessed, preliminary syntheses are made characterising all the new evolutions of the situation since the past assessment. At the end of the assessment period, a five days workshop is organised to conclude the step of information sharing and crosschecking. In addition, analysis tools, developed with Microsoft Excel, are used to process and analyse quantitative and qualitative data.

KEY FINDINGS: FOYA, KOLAHUN, VOINJAMA DISTRICTS**I. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY****1. Population Movements and Return Mechanisms**

A gradual return of the population is on going in the three districts since late 2003 and continues today. According to figures gathered, 43% of the previous population is back in the communities of the three districts assessed. In the surveyed communities of Voinjama, around 53% of the previous population is estimated back, while in the communities of Foya and Kolahun districts, the same estimation gives respectively 38% and 43% of the previous population back².

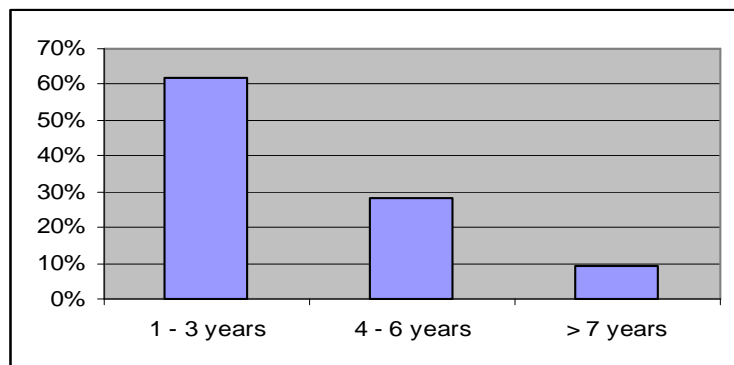
The level of return is not similar in all the communities visited. ACF observed that the largest towns as well as those located close to the place of refuge for the population have experienced more returns than the small and remote towns in rural areas.

On average, the returnees have spent 4.1 years out of their community. The duration of exile varies depending on the districts assessed. The data collected shows that the inhabitants of Voinjama districts have left their places of origin for a longer time than those of Foya and Kolahun. On average, they have spent 5.6 years out of their community while the duration of exile is respectively 2.9 and 3.9 years for the inhabitants of Kolahun and Foya districts³.

² The data are gathered with the population in the different communities assessed, they can not be considered as an actual census.

³ It is clearly linked to the past 14 years of crisis and the different tribes involved in the conflicts.

Graph 1: Average duration of exile in the 3 districts



In their majority, the returned population joined their place of origin with their entire family. Yet, 31% of them are still awaiting family members to come. In Voinjama district, 56% of the surveyed households are expecting more members to join the family. It is partly explained by the high proportion of returned IDPs in the area as many of them have left family members in camps waiting for the official repatriation.

The repatriation process for refugees started on the 2nd of February 2005. As of end of March, the repatriation process facilitated the return of 3,255 refugees, mainly from Guinea⁴. The repatriation of IDPs should start in April.

Considering the large number of refugees and IDPs originating from Lofa County, the impact of the official repatriation is not yet significant. The process is slow regarding the agricultural calendar and the coming rainy season. The food security of the population will be made more precarious if majority of them are prevented to return on time for the farming season.

In addition, the structures to host returned refugees are not adequate in all the districts visited.

⁴ Source: UNHCR Monrovia. The data collected concern the entire county. More detailed data should be available in the month

In Kolahun, the returnees are dropped in town and a school building, unfit for such a purpose, serves as transit centre. In Foya, the transit centre is not operational yet. Since the repatriation process started two months ago, this situation needs to be addressed immediately.

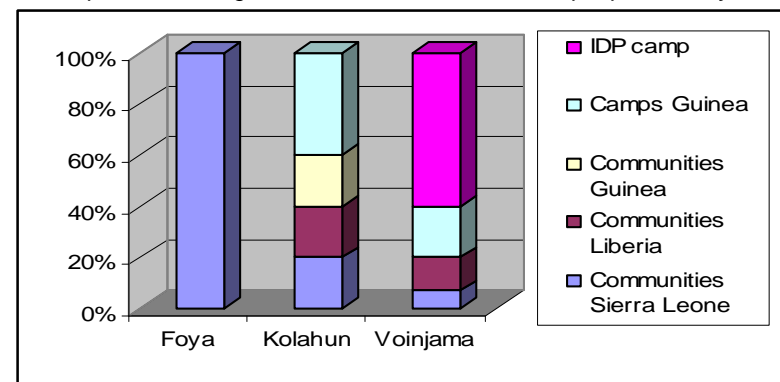
The data collected in communities indicate that the “recent returnees”, who came back, represent around 13% of the actual population. It seems that the massive returns expected beginning of the year is more a continuous and regular return process.

The delay and the slowness of the repatriation process is a clear factor influencing the level of return, since Liberians displaced expect to be facilitated in their way home.

The communities visited in the districts of Voinjama and Foya have experienced more returns (17%) than the communities in Kolahun where only 5% of the population has been identified as recent returnees.

Depending on their district of origin, the “recent returned” households are coming from different places of asylum. 97% of them stated they returned on their own, and only 3% were facilitated by the UNHCR.

Graph 2: Percentage of recent returned households per place of asylum



The major constraints faced by returnees at their arrival are the lack of shelter, food and income opportunities. Many of them have to rebuild a shelter and live in a neighbours' house during that time. The last harvest of 2004 has been disrupted and rice stocks are scarce and, finally, as a consequence of the war, many of the returnees have to restart their livelihood with limited means in a difficult context.

The resident population considers these returns positively as the returnees are involved in the development of the community and provide additional manpower. On the other hand, they consider that the lack of shelters and food can cause some difficulties and make their community more vulnerable.

2. Demography and Household Composition

The assessment indicates a balanced gender distribution, with the proportion of males slightly higher (51%) than females (49%).

Due to the continuous returns and family reunion, the average household size has significantly increased to 8.5 individuals⁵. In Voinjama, the average is 9.4 individuals per household. As 30% of the population did not return with the entire family, this average will slightly increase in the future.

The household composition is similar in the three districts. Inside the household, the larger group is composed of the 15 to 50 years old, followed by the 5 to 15 years old and the 0 to 5 years old.

On average, there are 5.4 individuals supporting the household livelihood. In relation with the household size, this average is also slightly superior in Voinjama district with 6.2 "individuals at work".

⁵ A household is composed of individuals eating in the same pot; most of time they are relatives of the same family. In December 2004, the average household size was 6.3.

Table 3: Household composition per sex and age in the 3 districts

Age	< 5 M	< 5 F	5-15 M	5-15 F	15-50 M	15-50 F	> 50 M	> 50 F
Average	13%	13%	15%	12%	18%	22%	5%	3%

Legend: F: female / M: Male

3. Community Organisation

In all the towns assessed, a similar leadership structure is being organised. Presently, the temporary structures previously put in place by former fighting groups and/or resettled communities are being gradually replaced either by individuals occupying these positions prior to the last crisis and/or newly appointed individuals by the central government.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A gradual return of the population is observed in the majority of the communities assessed. Yet, the massive returns expected beginning of 2005 did not take place.

According to the data gathered, on average, 43% of the previous population is back in the communities of the three districts.

As of end of March, 3,255 refugees have been repatriated in Lofa County while the same exercise had not started for IDPs. As a consequence, 97% of the "official displaced households" surveyed returned to their place of origin on their own, without any assistance.

In most cases, they joined their communities with their entire family but more family members are expected.

As majority of the "officially displaced" from Lofa are still out of the county, it is then imperative to speed their repatriation before the rainy season and the elections period. In order to make it possible, the availability of food and non-food items and transport means should be continually ensured, massive information campaign should be put in place and the registration process at place of asylum made more effective.

Their "immediate" resettlement could be supported through targeted seeds and tools, construction materials and households assets distributions.

The food security of the population in Lofa County will be made more precarious if the majority of the returnees had to come back after the farming season.

The humanitarian community should develop strategies and implement programmes in order to avoid and anticipate any degradation of the already poor food security situation of the population.

Regular and detailed information regarding the planning, the strategy and the advancement of the repatriation process should be systematically disseminated to the humanitarian actors.

II. INFRASTRUCTURES AND ACCESSIBILITY

The gradual return of the population and the concentration of inhabitants in some communities raise more and more concerns regarding the access to basic social infrastructures. It is particularly the case regarding the access to safe drinking water but also regarding the housing, the health posts and the schools.

1. Housing

The information collected in the communities confirms that around 88% of the existing shelters before the war have been totally destroyed.

In March 2005, following the continuous return of the population, around 35% of the previous shelters were rebuilt and 16% of the shelters are under construction⁶.

⁶ The data were collected with the population; it is not an actual census.

This situation constrains 50% of the households interviewed to share their house and leads to a tangible overpopulation of the shelters.

Linked with the constant reconstruction of shelters, ACF observed that the average number of households occupying one shelter has decreased from 2.3 in December to 1.8 in March 2005. Nevertheless, the increase in the resettled population has resulted in an augmentation of the number of individuals residing in a shelter. On average, they were 11 in December and are 12.7 in March.

Table 4: shelters' conditions and population per shelter

Districts	Rebuilt	Under construction	HH	Individuals
Foya	25%	6%	1.8	12
Kolahun	47%	4%	2	13.1
Voinjama	40%	38%	1.5	12.1

ACF also observed that in many places, especially in Kolahun and Foya districts, the shelters recently constructed are smaller than the previous habitations. According to the population, these shelters, built with local materials, are temporary and should be enlarged later when the access to more construction materials (zinc sheet, cement, etc...) will be easier.

In Voinjama districts, some communities assessed have benefited from the support of Peace Winds Japan and have rebuilt more sustainable and comfortable houses. From the discussion with the population in Kolahun and Foya, it seems that communities are also expecting NGO to support them in this task.

2. Water and Sanitation

Out of the 12 communities assessed, a total of 2 protected water points⁷ were used by the population.

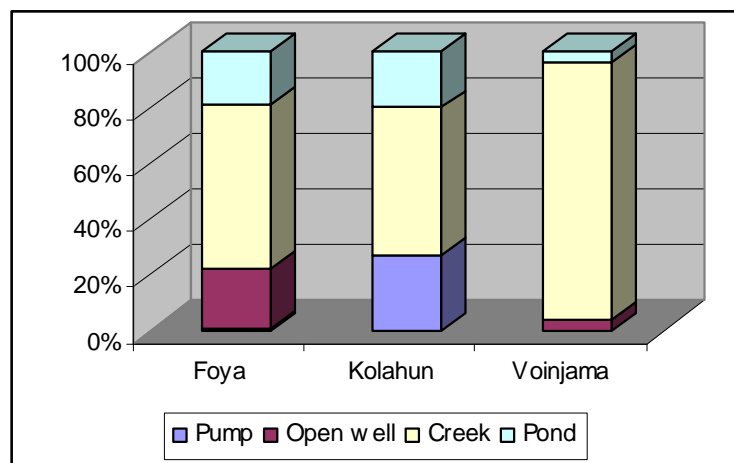
⁷ Protected water points: protected wells and water pumps.

Regarding to the current population, the actual drinking water coverage is therefore considered as extremely critical, at only 8% of the needs⁸.

This situation is even made more worrying as we know that 10 of the communities assessed representing 92% of the population (5,795 individuals) have no access to any protected water points. Sometimes the infrastructure exists but is not functional due to technical problems or insufficient yields.

As a result of this situation, only 9% of the population access safe drinking water through hand pumps while the large majority accesses drinking water through creeks (67%), ponds (15%) and open wells (9%).

Graph 3 : access to drinking water per type of sources



Regarding the sanitary conditions, public latrines only exist in one town assessed. In addition, no more than 4% of the households have private latrines. As a result, the bushes remain the primary place to defecate for 80% of the population.

⁸ This average is calculated on the basis of 1 protected water point functioning for 250 inhabitants.

According to the information collected, the population is using the public latrines if existing when this infrastructure is not present at the household level.

3. Health

Out of all the towns assessed, none had a functioning health post. On average, the inhabitants of a community need 3.5 hours to reach the closest facility, but, depending on the district and the town's location, the distance to access medical treatment varies. The inhabitants of Ziazou, Fokolahun, Koilahun II and Foya Tengia need to travel 4 hours to access the closest health structures while those of Pasolahun need 9 hours.

The majority of the health structures currently functioning in the three districts, especially in rural areas, are funded by private and/or foreign donors and run by private organisation and/or INGOs (MSF, IMC, ICRC, etc.). The same NGOs are planning to open new clinics in expectation of the expected population to come.

In addition, it was reported by the population accessing some of these clinics that drugs were sometimes not available in the health posts run by NGOs.

4. Education

The survey focused on elementary school. According to the information collected, before the last crisis, a public school was functioning in 11 of the 12 communities visited. As of March 2005, 5 communities have reactivated school activities. All of the schools visited are public, and no private school has been reopened. Most of the time, the community is managing the school in temporary buildings (churches, shelters, dilapidated school buildings, etc.) through their own means. The community teachers are not officially appointed by the government but supported by the members of the community.

According to the information gathered, 47% of the 5 to 15 years old children are attending elementary school. The analysis clearly shows that children attend school when a school is functioning in a community.

On the contrary, even if few households send their children to a school out of the village, the majority of the children living in a community without school do not benefit from any schooling.

5. Market

The last crisis and the large movements of population led to the closure of many markets in the area. Only one market reopens in one of the towns assessed. If there is no market in town, the inhabitants of the three districts access other places to buy and sell goods. The communities located near the border can travel to neighbouring countries to access market but most of time the district capital is the place of reference as it is the principal point of trade. The inhabitants of Ziazou, Fokolahun, and Foya Tengia need to travel 4 hours to access the closest market while those of Pasolahun need 9 hours.

6. Accessibility

Due to the poor maintenance and the lack of investments dedicated to the road network, the accessibility to towns located in rural area is not guaranteed all along the year.

During the dry season, the majority of the towns visited are accessible by truck and 4X4. Taxis reach less than 1/3 of the towns. During the rainy season 91% of the towns are still accessible by 4X4 but only 41% of them can be accessed by trucks. Taxis are not able to reach any town any more.

According to the roads assessment, the priority should be given to Kolahun and Foya districts. The road from Voinjama to Kolahun and from Kolahun to Foya is in poor conditions.

The isolation of some communities due to the difficult or non-existent "road network" will prevent them to easily access markets, health posts, etc. Humanitarian aid provided to such communities could also be limited, and the repatriation and electoral process made more difficult.

Conclusion and recommendations

The increase in the population raises concern regarding the access to basic social facilities.

The reconstruction of shelters is on going but the populations have difficulties to access the construction material needed, especially roofing material. Peace Winds Japan is supporting some communities in Voinjama district but this type of intervention is not implemented in Kolahun and Foya districts. An extension of this type of support in these districts will be helpful.

A support to the shelters' reconstruction for the returnees, as it is their first priority, will help them to resume more easily their livelihood. Zinc distribution and construction material could be more largely implemented.

Considering the poor access of the population to some basic facilities, there is a need to increase the number of infrastructures dedicated to water, health and education.

The coverage in safe drinking water in the communities visited is extremely low (8%). In addition, some of the pumps installed by the NGOs are not working properly. *The number of protected water points must be increased, especially in populated communities. More regular monitoring of the water points installed by NGOs needs to be implemented.*

Inhabitants of rural communities have to travel long distances to access medical treatment. *More health posts are necessary, especially in rural areas of Foya district. Measure should also be taken in order to ensure that drugs are always available in the clinics.*

Regarding education, the schools visited in the rural communities are all managed by the community. They are functioning with very limited support and no official teacher is appointed by the government. *More schools are also necessary in order to ensure the education of children residing in rural communities.*

The poor accessibility of the area, especially during the rainy season must make the road rehabilitation to be more effectively conducted. The districts of Kolahun and Foya should be targeted as a priority since UNMIL forces are already in charge of the south part of the county (road to Voinjama).

Regarding all of these issues, several NGOs and UN organisations are continuing to render assistance to the communities but more support is still needed. The involvement of the Liberian Government in supporting the rural communities' recovery is poor and should be increased in order to prepare the take over with the NGOs.

III. LOCAL ECONOMY

1. Sources of income

The population living in the communities assessed have different sources of incomes. In March 2005, 59% of them have two or more sources of income while 37% have only one source and 3% no source of income at all.

The main activities people implement to access cash are the sale of palm oil, the sale of vegetables, the sale of bush meat, petty business and contract labour.

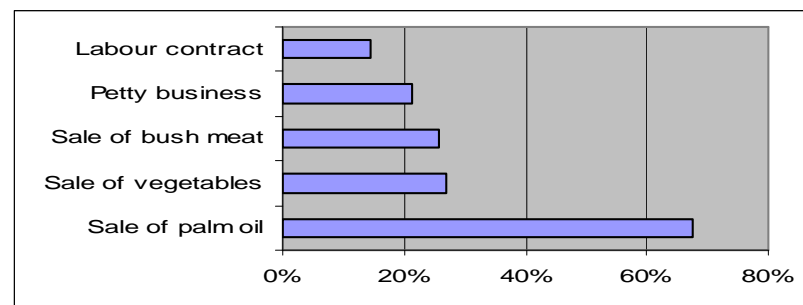
Being the highest income generating source at this stage of the agricultural calendar, palm oil production has reach its peak as the end of the dry season marks the maturity stage of palm nuts. The vegetable production has also started during this period and constitutes a major source of income, especially in the communities assessed in Kolahun and Foya districts. The sale of bush meat is a major activity in Voinjama and Kolahun districts but not in Foya where the forest is less dense.

A significant reduction of the petty business activities has been observed in the communities of the three districts, more particularly in Voinjama.

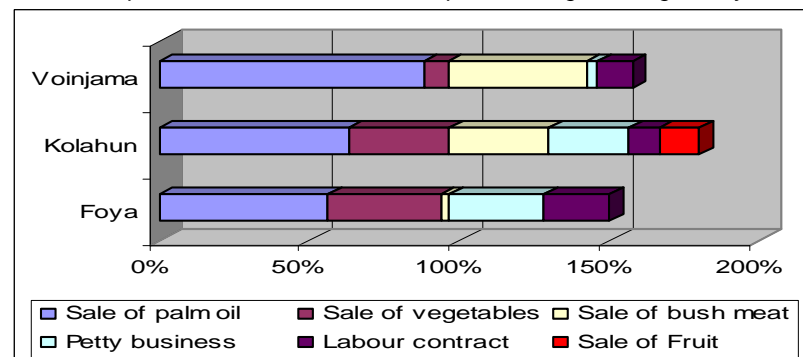
On average, 48% of the households were involved in this activity in December while in March, it is no more than 21% of them. An explanation can be the rapid spending of the cash distributed during the disarmament end of last year.

Labour contracts (preparation of farms, rubber exploitation, etc.) remain an important source of income for the population. Other incomes generated by the sale of fruit, cocoa and the support from relatives, while they remain limited, complete the monthly revenue of the households.

Graph 4 : % of households involved per income generating activity in the 3 Districts



Graph 5: % of households involved per income generating activity



According to the data collected, the average monthly amount of money earned per household is 31.8 US. 57% of the households interviewed live with less than one US a day⁹. With an average of 10 US cents a day per individual, the economic situation of the households remains precarious.

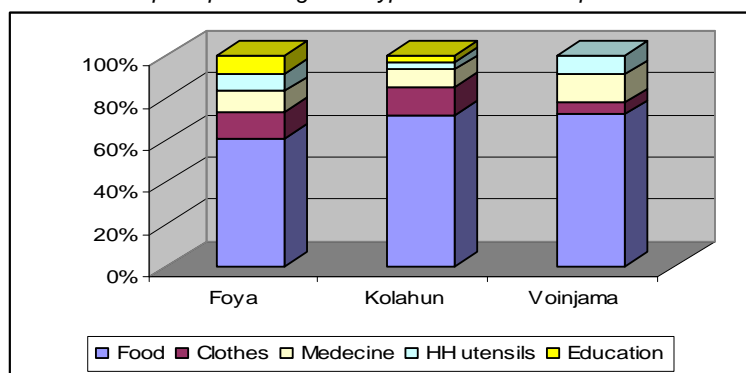
2. Expenditures

Households' income is spent on basic needs. Across the three districts the expenditures of the population are fairly similar. The majority of household expenses are dedicated to food purchase (67%), while access to clothes (11%), medicine (10%), household's utensils (7%) and education (7%) also constitute a significant part of their expenditures.

The large part of the expenses spent on the purchase of food (mainly rice) is explained by the limited rice stock resulting from the poor harvest of last year farming season.

The survey shows that 27% of the households have the opportunity to constitute some savings at the end of the month. Yet, this amount of money is rarely reinvested in profitable activities but more often kept in expectation of more basic needs (health, food, etc.)

Graph 6: percentage and type of household expenses



⁹ In March 2005, 1 US = 55 LD.

3. Markets and Trade Links

The situation is slightly different on the different markets assessed.

In Foya market, "country rice", mainly coming from Sierra Leone is highly available on the market. The price remains unchanged (10 LD/Cup). No "imported rice" has been seen on the market. The schnapps of palm oil is also sold 5 LD less than in the markets of Voinjama and Kolahun.

The trade links with Sierra Leone and Guinea are important regarding goods such as: peanuts, bony fish, bush meat, kerosene, gasoline, candle, etc. Other goods (vegetables, beans, cassava, pepper, etc.) are originating from the area. There is no or only few connexions with Monrovia.

In the two other markets of Kolahun and Voinjama districts, imported rice, coming from Monrovia, has started to replace local rice. Local rice has not been found in Kolahun market. The price of the imported rice remains high, between 15 to 20 LD a cup. In Voinjama, local rice is poorly available and sold at 17.50 LD per cup.

The major trade links for the market of Kolahun are mainly effectuated with Guinea for imports. Local goods are coming from the surroundings. Trade links with Monrovia are not reactivated.

Regarding the market in Voinjama, imported products are mainly coming from Monrovia while the local goods are found in the area.

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the slight resumption of the local economy, the survey shows that 57% of the household are living with less than 1 US a day.

The population relies in different sources of income but, on average, 37% of the households surveyed have only one source.

The multiplication of incomes generating activities, the commercialisation of profitable products, skill trainings, etc., could be supported by humanitarian organisations and the Liberian Government in order to facilitate the resumption of the local economy.

The late return of the population and the constraints during the last rice harvest explains that the purchase of food is still the major household expense. The proportion of the expenditure dedicated to food should remain high (67%) or even increase in the months to come as majority of the farmers already harvested their 2004 rice production. The next rice harvest is planned in the month of October at the earliest.

Particular attention should be paid regarding the price and the availability of the staple food items, rice in particular, in order to be sure that sufficient access to food for the population is continually ensured.

IV. AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SITUATION

1. Agricultural Production

In beginning of 2005, farming activities have resumed in the communities visited across the three districts of Lofa County. On average, 85% of the households interviewed are involved in farming production and 60% of them are practising two or more activities.

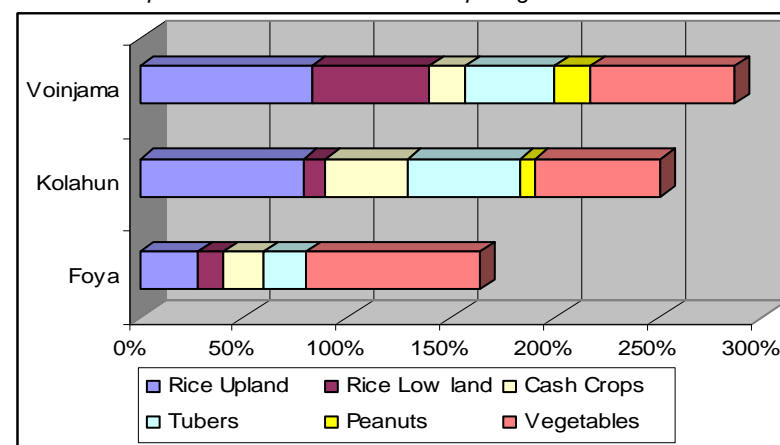
In the communities of the three districts, the main agricultural productions realised by the population concern: vegetables (71%), upland rice (63%), tubers (40%), cash crops (26%), low land rice (25%) and peanuts (7%).

With the beginning of the dry season, the vegetables production has increased significantly. It concerns also the tubers, principally the cassava, cultivated in Voinjama and Kolahun districts mainly. The cash crops production has also slightly resumed. Farmers are mainly brushing and cleaning the fields of cocoa and coffee and planting tobacco.

With the agro calendar on going, more and more households get involved in the rice cultivation.

In March 2005, the priority is clearly given to up land rice production in the three districts. Nevertheless, Foya districts is a main producer of swamp rice and the proportion of households involved in rice production should increase as we approach the heavy rainy season, the privileged period to start the swamp cultivation.

Graph 7: % of households involved per agricultural activities



According to the results of the survey, 81% of the population in the three districts have access to farming tools. Among them, 67% have benefited from the tools distribution organised by ICRC.

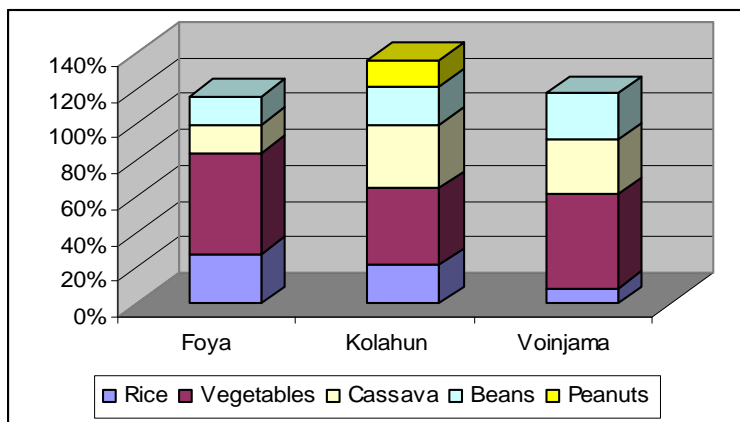
In December, the population was mainly using old farming tools or borrowing the tools from the community. In March 2005, on average, in the communities of the three districts, 47% of the farming tools at the disposal of the population are resulting from this distribution while the purchased and old tools represent 32% and 19% respectively.

The access to seeds remains limited but is becoming more important. As we come into the planting season more households have bought seeds. In the months preceding March, 17% of the population had accessed rice seeds.

The stocks of rice seeds for this farming season are scarce as, on average, the farmers have only 28 kg dedicated for planting¹⁰. These seeds are mainly coming from their own production (54%), purchased (38%) or loaned (8%). As ICRC has planned to distribute seeds for around 42,000 households in the entire Lofa County, this situation will change in the next months.

The main seeds and cuttings accessed by the population for the same period where vegetables (43%), cassava (24%) and beans (18%). Only 4% of the population obtained peanuts seeds.

Graph8: % of households per type of seeds and cuttings accessed



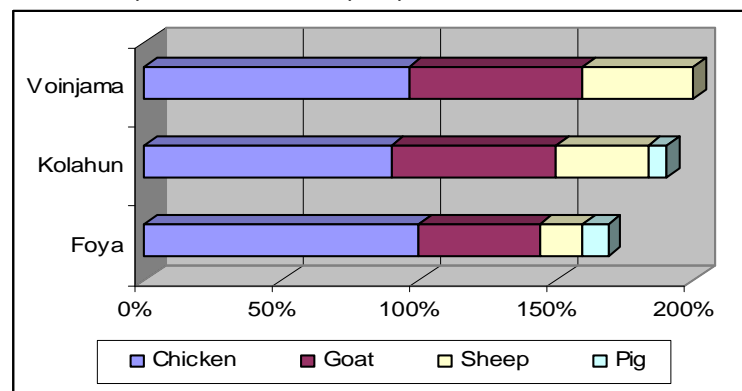
¹⁰ According to the agro survey done by ACF in July 2004 in Voinjama districts, farmers used to plant around 85 Kg of rice before the last crisis.

2. Livestock

Before 1990, the animal breeding used to be a significant sector of activity for the population in the three districts. 96% of the households surveyed used to have animals and 50% of them used to breed 2 species or more.

The data collected in the three districts show that, on average, 96% of the households bred chicken, 55% bred goats, 29% sheep and 6% pigs. Half of the households interviewed had more than 27 chickens and 3 goats. Sheep and pigs were less represented and more unequally distributed.

Graph9: % of household per species of animal bred before 1990



In March 2005, the livestock revival is not yet significant. Only chickens are significantly present. Yet it concerns only 58% of the households surveyed and the quantity of chickens per household is smaller than in the past.

3. Household food consumption

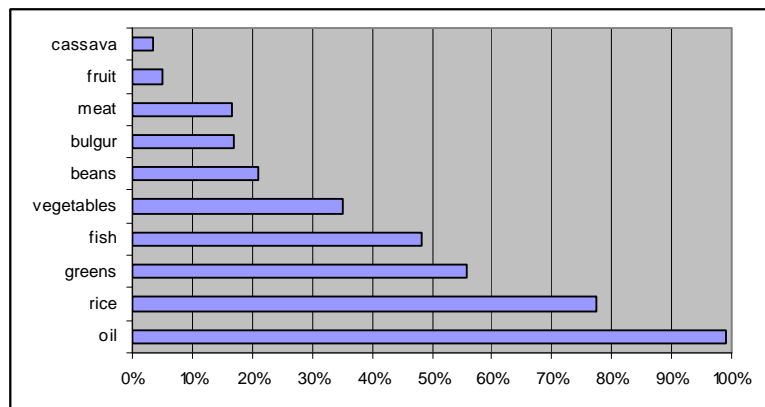
Caution is necessary regarding this topic since households will only consider meals including rice as actual food. Data collected was mainly based on a "24 hours recall" of food consumed by the household.

The results of the survey show that a large majority of the households eat one time a day (85%) while 14% of them eat twice, and only few three times a day. The reduction of the daily meal consumed has slightly increased since December 2004¹¹. It is mainly due to the limited rice stock resulting from the disrupted last harvest but also to the scarce income opportunities since the staple food is mainly purchased.

The family diet is mainly composed of rice, oil and greens. Fish, vegetables, meat, beans and bulgur are often completing the meal. Fruits and tubers are less consumed. Bulgur has gain in importance in the daily food consumption. It is clearly linked to the arrival of some displaced Liberian who used to access this food regularly but it is also due to the difference in the price with rice. While a cup of rice is sold 10 to 15 LD, a cup of Bulgur can be bought at 5 LD.

Majority of the households who did not consume rice have eaten bulgur instead.

Graph 10: % of households per food item consumed



According to the “monthly food access” assessment, the household have the opportunity to obtain majority of the basic food items.

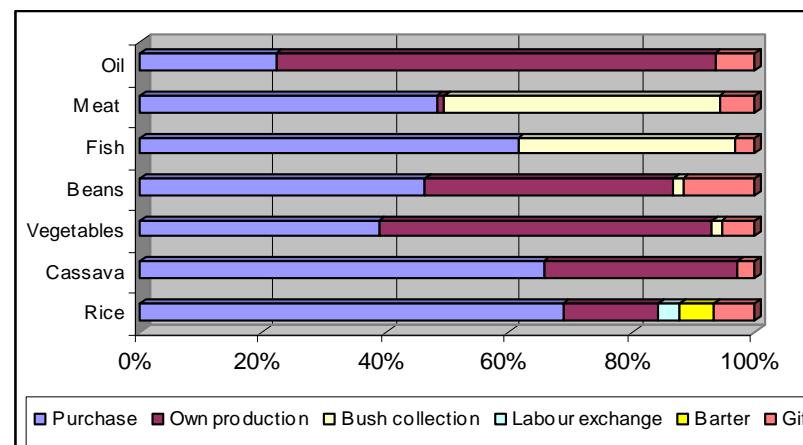
¹¹ In December, the proportion of households eating only once a day was of 77%.

Nevertheless, the results gathered in the communities of the three districts point out that 12% of the households did not access rice or fish in February, and 28% did not access meat or beans.

The rice, staple food in the area, seems to be more and more difficult to access, especially in Voinjama districts where 41% of the surveyed household did not access it last month.

The food consumed is mainly accessed through “purchase”, “own production” and “bush collection”. The rice consumed is mostly purchased. This is partly due to the poor harvest and the subsequent lack of rice stock for a large part of the population. In March 2005, the rice stock availability was still very low since only 20% of the households had a small rice stock of around 90 kg that will provide them food for about 2.5 months.

Graph 11: Type of access to basic food items



Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the end of the crisis, the food situation of the population remains precarious.

Since farmers have faced many constraints harvesting the 2004 rice cultivation, the food stocks are limited and majority of the population has no other option but to purchase food (especially rice).

The rice stocks are very limited and the access to rice seems to be more difficult than in December. This situation will have to be closely follow-up in the next months.

The hunger gap period will be longer this year and the large majority of the households will have to buy rice until the completion of next harvest. Therefore, a regular monitoring of the rice price and availability in the area is necessary to put in place. As the income opportunities are limited, the access to this staple food should equally be regularly monitored.

In March 2005, the agricultural activities have resumed across the three districts. 85% of the population is involved in agricultural activities. The main cultivations implemented are: vegetables, upland rice and tubers.

The access to farming tools has been greatly facilitated by the distribution organised by ICRC. On average, 67% of the population have benefited from new tools. 81% of the population in the three districts have access to farming tools.

Access to seeds remains limited as only 17% of the population had accessed rice seeds in the beginning of the year. This situation should evolve following the distribution planned by ICRC and the advancement in the agricultural calendar. Nevertheless, the high level of expected returns will reduce the impact of the seeds distributed and increase the pressure on the food available in the area.

As a consequence, the level of return and the food security of the population should regularly be monitored. According to the evolution of the situation, strategies of interventions should be put in place by the humanitarian community in order to anticipate any degradation of the food security of the population.

A part from chickens, the relatively significant livestock existing in the past is not reactivated, as it is not a first priority of the population.

Since majority of the population in the area used to breed goats, a support to the recapitalisation of this particular livestock will help to the households to resume their livelihood.

V. HUMANITARIAN AID

Although it has not been possible to identify all the agencies, the number of humanitarian organizations implementing programmes in the three districts seems to be limited regarding the size of the area, the needs of the population and the expected population to come.

All of the communities assessed have benefited from humanitarian interventions in beginning of 2005. Nevertheless, beside the tools distribution realised by ICRC, which targeted each community assessed, only few other interventions have been carried out, mainly by ACF (hand pumps) and Peace Winds (distribution of roofing material)¹².

Despite the humanitarian support given to communities in the three districts, the living conditions of the population remain precarious. It is particularly the case in terms of access to safe drinking water, basic infrastructures and facilities (shelters, roads, schools and clinics), but also in terms of availability and access to food and agricultural recovery.

Although there is no actual crisis, more assistance is still needed. The volatile context requires the humanitarian community to keep monitoring the evolution of the situation. Relevant strategies and programmes of intervention have to be set up in order to anticipate any degradation of the situation.

¹² Other agencies such as MSF, IMC, LCIP (Liberia Community Infrastructure Program), IRC, etc. are implementing activities in the area but not in the specific communities assessed for this assessment.

Short term combined with more long term projects and an effective humanitarian coordination will also permit to address more efficiently and durably the needs of the population.

On their own, the population is largely involved in the reconstruction of their community, rebuilding shelters, temporary schools, rehabilitating bridges and brushing roadsides but other needs are to be addressed.

Beginning of 2005, the priority needs of the population were mainly expressed in terms of (in order of importance): construction of shelters, school rehabilitation, hand pumps installation, access to clinic, access to rice seeds, availability of food and construction of latrines.

VI. SECURITY

According to the information gathered, the security conditions are good and no major security incident has been observed in the communities assessed.

The deployment of some national administrations such as the police, the immigration office, the court of justice, etc. tends to prove that the area is more and more peaceful.

Nevertheless, the lack of support from the Liberian Government, the nearly non-existent "*Reintegration and Rehabilitation*" programme and the limited assistance from the humanitarian community, combined with the continuous return of the displaced in a context characterised by a poor access to basic social facilities, the poor availability of food and income opportunities, is not favourable to the establishment of a sustainable peaceful environment.

CONCLUSION

The food security situation of the populations living in the communities assessed in the three districts is undermined by the devastating damage resulting from the recent crisis. In every sector of the populations' livelihood, the negative impacts of the crisis are still determining.

As a consequence, the actual livelihood situation is characterised by a restricted access to basic social infrastructures, a difficult and costly access to food and a limitation in the sources of incomes.

Following the restoration of peace and the disarmament, a gradual return of the population is on going in the three districts. Yet, the official repatriation process is slow and delayed. While 3,255 refugees have been repatriated since the beginning of the process in February, the repatriation of IDPs has not started.

In conclusion, despite the slight resumption of their livelihood and their important capacities to set up coping mechanisms, the populations remain vulnerable. The flow of returnees expected, if they arrive after the farming season, will make the food security situation of the communities to become precarious.

The evolution of the needs has to be closely followed-up. The Government of Liberia and the humanitarian community should take measures in order to anticipate any degradation of the food security situation. Strategies should be developed and more programmes implemented in coordination with the Government of Liberia and the humanitarian actors.