ROSA Focus

This Month's Highlight

IPC: using information to fight food insecurity

To effectively address the food insecurity issue, it is crucial to clearly qualify each food insecurity situation, determine its level of severity, identify causes and provide tools for decision-makers

There are many information systems and analysis tools that try to do this. But the IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) is particularly innovative. It uses many indicators and provides a classification of the severity, scale and causes of food insecurity to improve decision-making and response strategies.

The IPC is now attracting much attention and expectations. Some believe that it is a comprehensive analysis tool that should apply to all geographical areas and all types of food insecurity situations. More and more organisations and donors working for food security want to participate in this multi-institution initiative[1].Several funding bodies are supporting it, including ECHO, which is currently the main funder.

However, it is only right to ask a number of questions about the development of the IPC, how it can be applied and used, governed and institutionalised.

AIDCO

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Box 1: What the IPC is… and what it is not

IPC is a tool for classifying the severity of food security situations, using a common classification scale. It makes it possible to compare across countries and periods, enables analysts to be accountable for results and justify their choices using transparent proof, and that allows clearly defined alerts to be sent, along with strategic information that helps designing interventions.

However, the IPC is not:

- A methodology: The IPC is a classification system and a set of protocols for Situation Analysis that integrates multiple data sources, methods, and analyses. Effective use of the IPC encourages a mixed method approach which is necessary given the complexity of the analysis and the need for triangulation.
- A stand alone information system: The IPC is designed as an "add-on" to existing information systems in any given country, to help make the most rigorous, consistent, and meaningful use of data and analysis. As such, the IPC can be equally applied in "data rich" and "data poor" settings, by defining the level of reliability of the analysis, depending on the quality and quantity of data available.
- A response protocol: The IPC is based on Situation Analysis. It has strong linkages to, but is not, Response Analysis. This distinction better ensures that IPC analysis is done in an unbiased manner - i.e., insulated as much as possible from the institutional, financial, and political pressures that can influence humanitarian interventions.

[1] Eight organisations are members of the partnership CARE International, the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC), FAO, FEWS NET, Oxfam GB, Save the Children (UK&US) and WFP.

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The IPC: a "meta-analysis" tool

Decision makers use many information systems and analysis tools, including FewsNet and early warning systems (EWS).

The IPC is not an information system because it uses information and the related data collected by existing information systems to analyse food and nutrition situations. Therefore, if the data used by information systems is scarce and not very reliable, the IPC will give only poorly reliable results that will need to be used with great care. But since it compiles all existing indicators, it has the advantage of identifying areas where data is scare or of poor quality. It is also different from early warning systems because it is based on more indicators and uses different information.

The IPC is a standardised tool that aims at providing a "common currency" for classifying food security. It is a standardised scale collating information on food security, nutrition and livelihood to analyse the type and severity of a crisis, and the consequences in terms of response strategies. The two main results expected from the IPC are 1) classification of the severity of food insecurity situations and 2) analysis of the food situation to help make political and humanitarian decisions.

There are five phases of food security classification by area and people group. They are general enough to cover a wide range of causes, population systems and political and economic contexts, but specific enough to remain distinct from each other and use different thresholds with varying degrees of precisions.

Very practically, the IPC consists of a number of operational tools, such as regularly produced maps. These regions, country or district maps show the different phases in each area, based on available data. The maps also show early warning levels, called the "Risk of Worsening Phase" because the food situation is likely to deteriorate in these areas. There are three levels for this phase 1) Watch, 2) Moderate Risk, 3) High Risk, to help decision-makers assess potential risks. The maps are very comprehensive and provide a lot of information. This is one of the advantages of the IPC. It summarises a great deal of very technical and detailed information, and makes it converge to determine the Food Security Phase to help decision makers (see Box 1).

Box 2. Reference Table and IPC Maps

The IPC consists of a Reference Table that guides analysis for the Phase Classification, divided into five phases of food security:

1. Generally Food Secure,
2. Moderately/Borderline Food Insecure,
3. Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis,
4. Humanitarian Emergency,
5. Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe.

Link to the full IPC Reference Table:
http://www.ipcinfo.org/attachments/ipc_ref_table.pdf

Link to the last maps produced for each country and where the IPC is operating:
http://www.ipcinfo.org/countries.php

The IPC: a tool for dialogue

An intrinsic part and one of the main benefits of the IPC is that donors, agencies and governments working on food security can work together to reach a common view of a specific food insecurity situation in a country, as well as its causes and the responses it requires. Through shared information and shared criteria, the IPC operates as a discussion Forum including all players (see box 3). From this point of view, the IPC is a consultative approach that functions on the country, regional and global levels.

At a regional level, the IPC is supported in conjunction with inter-agency working groups or Regional Economic Communities taking care to ensure "buy-in" and integration into current approaches and processes. At the regional level in Africa, the IPC is supported by the IPC steering committee of the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) for East and Central African countries. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the IPC is being developed by a Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee.

At the global level, the three structures of governance are the Steering Committee (a decision-making body including senior representatives of each of the 8 partner agencies), the Coordination Unit (the body responsible for rolling out the IPC) and the Technical Working Group (the main consultative body coordinating technical development). The global governance structure is currently being changed, with a double aim: 1) improve the representation of regional organisations and representatives who are not part of the current partnership; and 2) decentralise key functions out to regions or countries, by building

country capacity to carry out the IPC process and deliver quality results.

Box 3. An example of institutional dialogue

In early 2007, a first IPC assessment was conducted in Kenya through the existing Data and Information Subcommittee (DISK) of the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG). The process that followed involved the establishment of an analytical team led by a project manager from the FAO and supported by staff from three agencies including the Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP), FEWSNET and WFP. The analytical team was also composed by representatives from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Development, and Water and Irrigation.

Existing institutional structures within Kenya provide advanced information collection and early warning analysis, evidenced by regular food security outlook bulletins and bi-annual assessments. The IPC tool was introduced to complement these structures and fulfill a number of shortcomings recognised by stakeholders. These include enabling consistency in terminology and technical consensus; and providing a framework for integrating early warning information and situation analysis to capture dynamic aspects of a crisis.

Implementation was particularly enabled by the presence of an FAO technical support office at the state level since 2005. This allowed the identification of appropriate structures to facilitate transparency and consensus; the identification of modalities for data collection and analysis; and the customisation of data and information to existing context

Source: IPC in Kenya. Lessons learned: short rain assessment 2007, Colin Andrew, ESAF-FAO

Developing the IPC in different contexts

The IPC was originally used in Somalia in 2004, but today it is used or being applied in fifteen countries (see Box 4). Central and East Africa (the greater Horn of Africa region) was targeted as a key region for developing the IPC, given the need for analysing the humanitarian situation there to support decision-making. It is also being adapted for use beyond this region, in West and Southern Africa and in South and Central Asia.

The way the IPC operates depends on the context and users. Each country defines its own protocol and information sources. The tool needs to be flexible enough to fit very different contexts. But the IPC reference concepts and results remain explicitly based on internationally accepted standards (e.g. Sphere) and are buttressed by IPC global structures, especially the Technical Working Group. The IPC provides a framework for a rigorous comparison of the severity and scale of food insecurity, while allowing a degree of flexibility.

Box 4. The IPC a tool created for Somalia and adapted to many other countries

The IPC was originally developed in 2004 for use in Somalia by FAO's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU). It provided a comprehensive vision of the food situation in a country hit by different crises (drought, civil insecurity, economic crisis, the Tsunami) and drew international attention to "forgotten" humanitarian emergencies.

The results fostered the use of the IPC in other countries. In 2005, the Working Group of the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) for East and Central African countries, that includes institutional stakeholders and NGOs involved in the region worked to develop the IPC in each country in order to produce a regional analysis. Burundi, Central African Republic, Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda, DRC, Ethiopia, North and South Sudan and Tanzania progressively implemented the IPC and today have progressed to different extents. The IPC has also been introduced in Eritrea, Rwanda, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Since 2008, the IPC has been used in the process for improving a harmonised analysis of vulnerability in the Sahel. The Vulnerability Harmonised Framework (CHB) set up by the CILSS[2], and currently being finalised, is a West African adaptation of the IPC.

Pilot schemes were started in 2006 in Nepal and 2007 in Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan to help adapt the IPC to contexts beyond East Africa. The scheme has progressed the furthest in Nepal.

[2] CILSS – The Permanent Interstate Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel is a group of nine West African countries: Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad and Cape Verde.

Questions that remain

The IPC evolves as it is applied and introduced into different contexts. Its development raises several questions in terms of techniques, strategy and governance.

Is it appropriate to apply the IPC outside emergency situations?

The IPC was drawn up with a view to applying it to all types of food insecurity situations. But since it was originally developed for emergencies, technical adjustments may be needed before applying it to other contexts. This could include changing the five phases and incorporating other dimensions, such as resilience and vulnerability. The whole issue is to retain the flexibility and local adaptation of the IPC without losing the fundamental advantage of comparability.

How should the IPC be used in resource programming?

The IPC is primarily an analytical tool and a help for decision makers, but it also has the potential to become a programming tool, because it highlights the "red" areas where food insecurity is the most severe. However, the risk of a geographical approach to response strategies is to exclude groups of people in certain areas, particularly in cities, because they are in areas which, taken as a whole, do not show up as being in situations of food insecurity. It should also be noted that governments can be reluctant to make comparisons between countries.

What institutional governance should be adopted?

An increasing number of organisations want to become members of the IPC. It is necessary to strike a balance in the governance structure between a restricted partnership whereby each member fully participates in decision-making, and a broader group with necessarily weaker participation. Similarly, a balance must be struck when broadening the range of indicators (e.g. to include health, encouraged by the WHO), because then there is a risk of making the IPC too ambitious.

How can governments and others be encouraged to buy in to the IPC, while guaranteeing the quality of results and a standardised approach?

When governments and others who are not directly involved in the IPC partnership apply the tool, it may be difficult to ensure that it is implemented correctly and assess the quality of results, to maintain comparability. This is why the IPC encourages the standardisation of analytical methods, proposing indicators and thresholds, so that it can be used by a large number of partners or players. Therefore, setting up a quality control for IPC processes and products, technical assistance and developing directives are a priority for the partnership.

Can the IPC be institutionalised everywhere?

Normally, the IPC process should be validated by governments of countries in which it is applied. However, institutionalisation is a long term process, and it may not be possible in conflict contexts where governments are partly responsible for the humanitarian crisis situation.

This article was prepared by the ROSA moderating team, with a support by Manuel Vega from the Joint Research Centre and FAO Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA), especially Oriane Turot.

For more information :

IPC website: maps and classifications for many countries, information about training workshops, publications, updates on IPC technical manual.

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification technical manual version 1.1, FAO, July 2008 (available on ROSA online library)

Looking back on past events: Review and consultation on the IPC, 25th and 26th June 2009, Johannesburg.

Current food and nutrition situation

Country Focus
Madagascar

The political crisis which began in Madagascar at the end of 2008, leading to the overthrow of the government, is one of the factors that have worsened food insecurity in the country. The Maputo agreement, signed in August 2009 to instate a power sharing arrangement between the various political camps, followed by national elections to be held within 15 months, is stalling despite some progress in October[3]. In this unstable context, donors are reluctant to commit more resources for development programmes, and humanitarian aid is proving insufficient.

Since the beginning of 2009, several extreme climatic events have been recorded. Cyclones and tropical storms have hit both the east and west coasts, leading to serious flooding. But the most worrying development has been the repeated drought in the south of the island. Furthermore, the region has experienced chronic food insecurity. In the south of the country, 44 municipalities are now exposed to extreme food vulnerability. The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has just mobilised 2.8 M€ on behalf of the most vulnerable households whose food and nutritional security remains precarious despite dry season harvests that were considered to be reasonably good following good rainfalls.

The food situation remains stable in the north of the country

Rice accounts for more than 50% of the national calorie consumption, and production is concentrated in the country's northern and central regions.

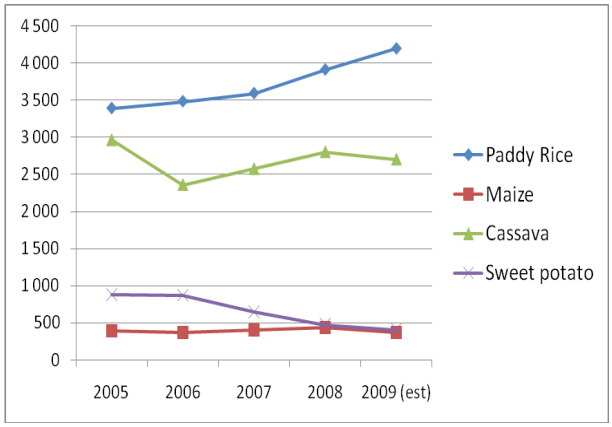
Despite the cyclones and floods at the beginning of the year, rainfall was good and harvests were relatively abundant in the major rice growing areas. In fact, national rice production grew by about 10% in 2009 compared to the previous year (figure 1). Moreover, maize production in the north and centre of the country has significantly increased (compensating the decline in the south).

The price of rice has generally dropped compared to 2008 though it is still higher than in previous years.

The south of the island hit by acute food and nutritional insecurity

The agricultural and food context in the south of the country is different. Lack of rain, persistent violent winds and poor soils make farming difficult and lead to repeated food crises. The lean season is critical for the population, because of the generally low quantities harvested and stored. Varying in intensity from one year to the next, it generally goes from November to January and when it leads to food shortage, and even famine, it is known as *kéré*. The economy of the region is dominated by stock raising and farming, but when there are climatic vagaries, food shortages during *kéré* periods forces most households to decapitalise (sell stock and goods) with serious impact on the nutritional status of vulnerable groups. The main crops are maize, sweet potato and manioc, which are most suited to the low rainfall in the region.

Figure 1: Main crop production since 2005 (in thousands of metric tonnes)



According to MAEP agricultural statistics and FAO/WFP estimates (2009)

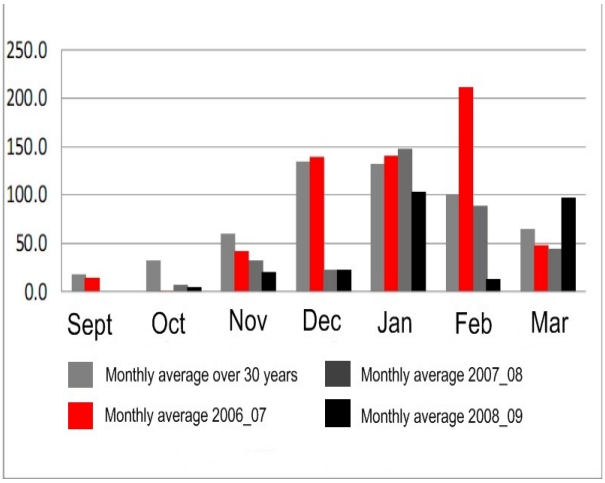
In the past 5 years, only the 2006-2007 season received sufficient rainfall for normal crop growth (see figure 2). Lack of rain, which has been particularly acute this year in certain regions, has led to very limited harvests. Figure 1 shows this decline in quantities produced in the south compared to 2008. The stability of maize production at the national level can be explained by the increased production in the north and centre of the country. On the other hand, in Toliara province, it would seem that production has fallen by 50% (FAO/WFP, 2009).

Food availability is therefore low in this region and the lean season will be difficult (see box for a

[3] During the night of October 6, the 4 parties reached an agreement to nominate a President, a Vice-President and a Prime Minister for the transition government.

diagnosis for the same period in 2007). Many households had to take out loans or decapitalise to face the difficulties of the early part of the year and many of them sold their meagre harvests to pay back their loans, without being able to store or recapitalise.

Figure 2: Average rainfall recorded by SAP's rainfall measuring stations (South)



Source: FAO/WFP, 2009 (in mm.)

Of the 104 municipalities in the region, the early warning system (SAP) estimates that 44 are extremely vulnerable at the start of the lean season (beginning in September/October).

Box 1: Nutritional difficulties during the lean season

GRET and IRD undertook a nutritional survey (Landais et al. 2007) at the peak of the lean season in 2007 (January-February) in two municipalities which had had a post-harvest diagnostic survey in 2005.

The difficult conditions of the lean season in 2007 caused a strong increase in the prevalence of emaciation among children aged 6-23 months (from 9.1% to 27.2%). Mothers lost an average 5.2 kg and the prevalence of emaciation (BMI<18.5kg/m²) went from 21.1% to during the post harvest season to 54.5% at the peak of the lean season.

A political and economic situation that remains uncertain

The political crisis has seriously impacted urban employment. The freeze on budget aid has reduced public investment capacity and the jobs which it creates. Moreover, the international economic crisis has led to mass redundancies in the industrial sector (textiles) and the service sector.

In the countryside, the economy is affected by the economic crisis with the rise in prices of staple products. Despite good crop prospects for rice, national production still cannot meet the national needs. The quantities of rice needed annually are imported by way of a national platform of traders, processors and importers that was set up after the food crisis in 2004-2005.

However, the government has announced that it intends to import 150 000 tonnes of rice and distribute them at subsidised price to combat food insecurity. If this measure is carried out without consultation, is it likely to destabilise existing markets. So importers are waiting, and will not risk importing, which could lead to soaring prices and a food deficit if the government does not distribute the expected rice.

Moreover, other governmental measures aim at subsidising the price of rice and reduce custom duty and VAT on imported rice. These measures will tend to bring down the price paid to producers, and are likely to discourage rice planting and investment in the rice industry. Consequently, this lack of incentive for rice production will limit the island's capacity to be self-sufficient in rice in the short or medium term.

An ambitious nutrition policy despite a difficult situation

The country's nutritional situation remains very precarious, particularly with chronic malnutrition affecting 45% of children under 10 (FAO/WFP, 2009).

In 2004, the Government adopted an ambitious National Nutrition Policy (PNN) as a concerted action to eradicate malnutrition in Madagascar. One of the strategies, the National Community Nutrition Programme (PNNC), seeks to harmonise interventions to fight against malnutrition. The government has created the National Nutrition Office (ONN) to meet this challenge.

Although the PNN is underway, it seems unlikely that it will meet the goals fixed for 2012.

Written by ROSA moderating team with editing support by Jacqueline Uwamwiza (EC delegation to Madagascar) and Mirrdyn Denizeau (GRET)

Further reading:

Food security evaluation mission in Madagascar - FAO/WFP (August 2009)

Vulnerability evaluation, United Nations System, July 2009

International news

A European Commission concept note on social transfers

The EC (unit E6) has published a concept note on social transfers to bring greater clarity to EC interventions in this area. Social transfers are a response to food insecurity because they improve the access of the most vulnerable groups to food and basic necessities. In the current context of multiple crises (food, economy, climate…) that accentuate the problems of access and vulnerability, this approach, halfway between relief and development, seems particularly appropriate for long-term use by governments and institutions.

The note presents the concept of social transfers as an instrument of *social assistance*, referring to one of the components of social protection (along with *social insurance* and *social legislation*). There are many types of social transfers, ranging from agricultural inputs to child or family allowances, and the forms of transfer also vary: cash, food vouchers, agricultural inputs, assets (farm tools, cattle …).

Various rationales for social transfers also exist. These may be social (fairness, social cohesion), economic (stimulating local markets and economic growth) human rights-based (the principle of universality) or political (government ownership of a project, redistributing resources). In terms of targets, the EC emphasises that a comprehensive social protection policy should extend from support for extremely poor people to wider categories of people living with poverty and vulnerability.

The note also gives many examples of the impact of social transfers in terms of poverty, hunger and malnutrition mitigation, the improvement of livelihoods, health, education, etc. However, it specifies that there are certain prerequisites before social transfers can be implemented. These include analysing the type and scale of poverty, verifying that the institutional and political context is favourable, that an appropriate legal framework exists and that social expenditure is rationalised.

At the operational level, the note identifies the points to consider for implementing social transfers: the type of transfer (form, value), the target, how it will be delivered, any conditions to be applied, management, points to be developed and illustrated in a "Reference Document". The note also shows the opportunities for EC intervention. The EC approach to social transfers must be particularly flexible and adapted to the context, following a sequence, and ranging from short to medium term. In fact many EC tools are already available for this type of intervention, including Country Strategy Documents, National Indicative Programmes, the Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP), counter-cyclical interventions (Food Facility, FLEX support for vulnerability) and budgetary support.

You can read the concept note on ROSA online library

Seminar on the EC responses to the social consequences of the crisis in Africa

EC AIDCO E6 Unit held a seminar in Dar-es-Salam from the 5th to the 9th of October on the responses to the social consequences of the food and financial crises in Africa. The seminar has gathered about 20 persons from EC delegations, the E6 unit or as social-transfer experts from UNICEF, RHVP and IDS. Discussions are in line with the recent implementation of EC Counter-cyclical responses to tackle the consequences of crises: Food facility (1 bn€), Vulnerability Flex Mechanism (500 M€), EDF B-envelope (200 M€), i.e. 1.7 bn€ in total. The purpose of the seminar was to exchange on those responses, their impacts and the opportunity to develop perennial safety nets targeting the poor, based on the social-transfer experiences implemented through the modality of budget support. The first part of the seminar was dedicated to provide principles and a conceptual definition of the approach, including experiences capitalised from EC Food Security Programme interventions. The second part focused on developing a social-transfer strategy aimed at the reduction of under-nutrition, from the design to the implementation phase.

For more information:
Looking back on past events on ROSA website

This bulletin was written by the GRET team in charge of animating ROSA (Operational Food Security Network). It is an initiative of AIDCO E6 (Thematic support for food security, rural development and environment) in collaboration with AIDCO G4 (Training and knowledge management). The viewpoints expressed do not in any case represent the official European Commission viewpoint.