

External quality review of IPC Acute Food Insecurity analysis in Afghanistan

September 2020

The IPC Analysis Team of Afghanistan (AT) carried out an IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis in September 2020 covering the entire country (rural and urban areas) for the periods of August 1st – October 31st (Current classification) and November 1st – March 30th (Projected classification).

The AT could not reach consensus in several areas including ten areas classified in IPC Phase 4 either in the current or projected period or in both. The disagreement involved FEWSNET on one side and the rest of the organizations represented in the AT on the other.

In accordance with IPC protocols, and upon request from FEWSNET, the IPC Global Support Unit (GSU) organized an external quality review related to all IPC Phase 4 classifications. The following IPC partners volunteered to participate in this process: ACF, CARE, FAO, FEWS NET and WFP. A team of five IPC analysts from these organizations reviewed the analysis worksheets and the rationale provided by FEWS NET for its disagreement. Two staff from GSU who had not taken part in the country analysis coordinated the work of the team. The review concerned the following areas and periods:

Area	Period	Area	Period	Area	Period
Badakhshan	Current	Faryab urban	Current	Kandahar urban	Projected
Badakhshan	Projected	Faryab urban	Projected	Nuristan	Projected
Badghis	Projected	Ghor	Current	Samangan	Projected
Daykundi	Current	Ghor	Projected	Uruzgan	Current
Daykundi	Projected	Hirat urban	Projected	Uruzgan	Projected

The conclusions of the external quality review team are the following:

1. **The classifications proposed by both, FEWS NET and the rest of the AT, comply with IPC Function 2 protocols.** In particular, both parties based their classifications on the evidence/assumptions presented and applied a convergence of evidence approach to conclude on their respective classifications as promoted by the IPC.

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2. Both FEWS NET and the rest of the AT have roughly used the same set of evidence to base their current classifications. The review team found that their classifications are different for the following reasons:

- In general, both parties consider differently the way outcome indicators drive the classification. The analysis team considered Food Consumption Score (FCS) and Livelihood Coping Strategies (LCS) as better descriptors of conditions in the current period. FEWS NET, on the other hand, considered that the suite of food security indicators (also including Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS), reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) and Household Hunger Scale (HHS)) when considered alongside contextual information, reflected better food security conditions in the current period.
- Both parties have considered evidence from focal points and key informants in the field. The fact that these evidences have not been documented in a clear manner in their respective analysis worksheets, has prevented the external review team from verifying how aligned these evidences were. For the purpose of this external quality review, the reviewers considered such evidence as valid but not a key determinant of the classification since, according to IPC protocols, their reliability should be “Ro”.¹ In future analyses, it is important to consider that lack of clear and systematic documentation of all evidence used is an obstacle to a shared understanding of the evidence base by analysts and therefore to building consensus. IPC protocols accepts the use of evidence from key informants, however these need to be documented in the worksheets and to the extent possible should refer to a specific report (Key Informants Interview reports, Field mission reports, et..).
- Some contributing factors have been considered differently with regards their influence on the food security conditions of households. For example, the duration of food stocks after the harvest exceeded the duration of the current period for a vast majority of the households in some of the areas. This was used by FEWS NET, together with higher livestock ownership and above average food prices, to consider that a phase 4 classification would be too severe in those cases. On the other hand, the AT took more into account the situation of IDPs in the areas of analysis and considered the impact of people returning from neighbouring countries that were affected by the COVID crisis – thereby causing a decrease in remittances and additional caseload of people looking for work in Afghanistan – to justify the classification of some areas.

The external review team examined evidence and analysis that both parties presented in their respective worksheets and agreed on **classification recommendations for the current period**. These classifications are presented in the table below and are based on the technical judgement of the members of the team. The team acknowledges its limitations related to the interpretation of the evidence given its limited knowledge of the local context.

¹ This implies that, after careful review, the evidence may be used to support the analysis but it cannot be counted towards achieving the analysis minimum evidence needs (“evidence levels”).

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Area - period	Classification by AT (except FEWSNET)	Classification by FEWSNET	Classification by Quality Review Team
Badakhshan - current	Phase 4	Phase 2	Phase 3
Daykundi-current	Phase 4	Phase 3	Phase 3
Faryab urban-current	Phase 4	Phase 3	Phase 3
Ghor - current	Phase 4	Phase 3	Phase 3
Uruzgan-current	Phase 4	Phase 3	Phase 3

3. The external quality review found that assumptions made by both FEWS NET and the rest of the AT significantly differ in all projected classifications considered. These differences are one main reason explaining the disagreements related to the projected IPC Phase classifications. Another important factor explaining the disagreements is probably the different current classifications that each party has used to conduct their projected analysis (except for urban Hirat and Kandahar).

4. In IPC, to develop assumptions, besides evidence, an analysis team may also use the knowledge of analysts who have a good understanding of the local context. Therefore, the quality review team felt that it cannot offer a comparative advantage over FEWS NET and the rest of the AT to decide which set of assumptions would better represent the most likely scenario. In broader terms, assumptions mainly diverge on the expected level of conflict (intensifying vs. continuing at the same intensity), the expected COVID-19 pandemic evolution at the national level and its impact on the global and country’s economy (high impact vs. low impact), the expected price trends (increasing vs. stabilizing) and seasonal patterns (single vs. second harvest).

The evidence provided in the analysis repository did not allow for adequate assessment of the scenario’s plausibility. For this reason, the quality review team has not proposed a projected classification for the areas reviewed. Instead, it focused on identifying aspects of the assumptions to be improved in the next analysis. These are summarized below and do not necessarily apply to all areas reviewed. For details on the findings of the external quality review, please refer to the annex of this report.

IPC Afghanistan Analysis Team

1. The Afghanistan AT formulated its assumptions in general terms. In several cases, it did not explain how each of the key drivers included in the assumptions (e.g. COVID 19 pandemic, border closures or conflict) affect, specifically, each income and food source that are relevant under the most likely scenario. In other words, while the driver is clear, clear documentation of the magnitude of its impact in different contexts seems to be missing. For this reason, for the external review team, it was difficult to understand some of the conclusions in the projected analysis.
2. When assumptions include a scenario of lockdown during the projection period, it would be useful that the analysis team clarifies to what extent lockdown measures are expected to be enforced.

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3. Key drivers such as the COVID 19 pandemic, conflict or levels of humanitarian food assistance, were not systematically included in the analysis of all the areas (e.g. Daykundi). Assumptions on key drivers that are expected to be relevant across all or many areas need to be discussed and agreed by the whole AT before concluding on the different elements in step 9 of the IPC analytical process. This to ensure that key drivers are considered in a consistent manner and in all areas where they are relevant.

FEWS NET

1. Sometimes assumptions refer to impact on sources of income that are relevant for a small share of the households (e.g. sales of cash crops in Nuristan or remittances in most of the areas). When assumptions refer to these minor sources, an explanation on the rationale for their inclusion would help understanding how these assumptions play in the process of convergence of evidence.
2. Second season production is often mentioned in FEWS NET's assumptions. However, it was not always clear whether the assumption referred to second harvests that may have occurred more broadly in Afghanistan, or whether it referred to second harvests that occur locally. The review team recommends that the local relevance of the harvest be more explicitly described in the assumptions.
3. In all areas, assumptions on humanitarian food assistance refer to the national level and miss to indicate a proportion of beneficiary households and quantities delivered. Such assumptions have limited usefulness in the analysis of the likely impact of humanitarian food assistance on household food consumption in the areas of analysis.
4. The assumption on natural disasters was too generic and could be adjusted to the livelihood under discussion.

Both

1. Some assumptions could be strengthened by indicating what evidence in the repository they are based on.
2. Assumptions related to livestock, should include reference to size of the herds and likely trends. This would allow an improved analysis of livestock as a potential source of income and food in the projection period in agro-pastoral areas.
3. The full set of information about humanitarian food assistance needs to be documented, shared, and used by all parties.

Other observations not related to assumptions that concern analyses from both parties

1. Evidence from pre-lean assessment could be useful to understand seasonal patterns in the areas of analysis. However, the use of such evidence appears to be limited when looking at the worksheets presented by the AT.
2. It would be useful to compare results of the classification with previous IPC classifications (e.g. April –May 2020) to check for coherence between results and expected trends.
3. Data on admissions for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) treatment from previous years at the time of projection can be helpful to project a phase classification for the area. The analysis presented by FEWS NET refers to such evidence but it is missing from the analysis repository.
4. The Livelihood Zoning Descriptions should also be included in the evidence repository.

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