

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENT BRIEF
FOOD INSECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN



Five key policy-relevant findings about food insecurity

May 2019

Topic: Poverty, Food Security

Food security has increased in line with poverty and 13 million Afghans (or 45 percent of the population) are food insecure in 2016-17.

This brief highlights five key policy-relevant findings about food insecurity in Afghanistan *prior* to the 2018 drought. These findings are based on analysis of the Afghanistan Living Conditions Surveys (ALCS, National Statistics and Information Authority, GoIRA).

Food insecurity and malnutrition are some of the most serious manifestations of protracted crises as they disrupt livelihoods and markets. Afghans have lived through foreign intervention, civil war, insurgency, and widespread insecurity for decades, severely disrupting Afghanistan's economic growth trajectory.

Over half of the Afghan population, approximately 16 million people, lives below the poverty line in 2016-17, a sharp increase over the last decade. Food insecurity has increased in line with poverty and 13 million Afghans (or 45 percent of the population) are food insecure. Of these, an estimated 3.9 million are very severely, 4.1 million severely and 5.0 million are moderately food insecure with a larger number and proportion of the rural population affected by food insecurity. Changing climatic conditions, a growing population, and other environmental stressors will likely have significant impact on food security going forward.

The diet of the Afghan population is not only inadequate in quantity, it is also qualitatively poor. Overall, half of the population has poor or borderline food consumption, highest in rural residents and 30 percent of Afghans do not consume adequate protein (at least 50 grams per person per day) from their food basket. Inadequate food quantity and quality can particularly have severe effects on the nearly 1.4 million children under the age of five who are vulnerable to malnutrition.

It is important to put the timing of the survey findings in context. The latest round of ALCS was collected prior to Afghanistan entering drought conditions due to deficit rain and snowfall of past years. The impacts of the current drought are severe in some areas of Afghanistan and an estimated 2.6 million people nationwide require urgent humanitarian action to reduce their food deficits and to protect their livelihoods, survive until the next harvest, and prepare for next year's planting season.

1. PRE-DROUGHT FOOD INSECURITY WAS HIGH AND INCREASING, ESPECIALLY IN WINTER MONTHS, AND IN SOME OF THE DROUGHT-AFFECTED PROVINCES

Food insecurity was on the rise prior to the 2018 drought, and has a clear spatial and seasonal dimension.

The share of the food insecure Afghan population (defined as caloric deficiency with respect to a threshold required to lead a healthy life) increased from 28 percent in 2007-08 to 45 percent in 2016-17 (Figure 1). As food expenditures account for more than half of all expenditures, deteriorating food insecurity is reflected in the sharp increase in poverty rates.

Food security has a clear spatial dimension. Over three quarters of Afghans who were considered food insecure in 2016-17—10 million people—lived in rural areas. About 50 percent of food insecure lived in just one third of Afghanistan's provinces. Food insecurity was particularly high in some of the provinces most severely affected by the 2018 drought in the north of Afghanistan. For example, over 60 percent of the population in Badakhshan and 50 percent of the population in Badghis and Daykundi were already food insecure in 2016-17.

Seasonal hunger is a pervasive feature of food insecurity in Afghanistan. In 2016-17, food insecurity was much higher during the winter months: compared to a yearly average of 37 percent of the population experiencing adequate food security, in the winter months, this drops to 17 percent (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Poverty and food security, 2007-2016

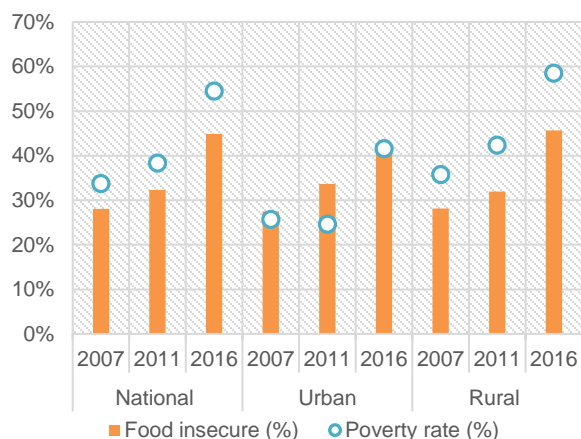
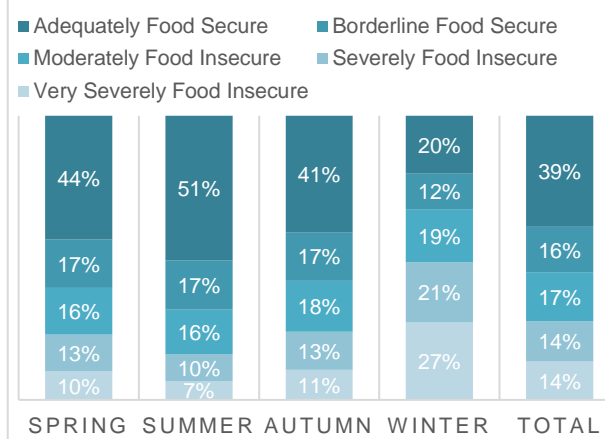


Figure 2: Food insecurity by season, 2016-17



Sources and notes: WB estimates based on NRVA 2007-08, NRVA 2011-12, and ALCS 2016-17

2. LACK OF INCOMES, POOR DIETARY DIVERSITY AND INADEQUATE NUTRITION UNDERPIN OVERLAPPING FOOD SECURITY DEFICIENCIES

Food insecurity and lack of incomes are closely related and reflected in insufficient dietary diversity.

Food insecurity is related to lack of incomes: of the 13 million food insecure Afghans, 9.7 million are poor. The poorest 20 percent of the population consumed only 11 food items on average, half the number of items consumed by the richest 20 percent. There is evidence of poor dietary diversity among Afghan households, and a heavy reliance on staple cereals as a source of cheap calories. Three quarters of calories of poor Afghans comes from cereals alone, predominantly from wheat. Non-poor Afghans also consume two-thirds of their calories from cereals, but their consumption basket is a little more diversified with higher shares of dairy products.

About 35 percent of Afghans do not consume a diet of sufficient quality—inadequate dietary diversity has almost doubled between 2011-12 and 2016-17, especially in rural areas (Figure 3). Poor dietary diversity implies that the Afghan diet often lacks adequate proteins and other micro-nutrients. In 2016-17, 36 percent of Afghans did not consume a sufficient number of proteins per day (less than 50 grams per day). Protein deficiency doubled in the past 10 years, with Afghans living in rural areas experiencing a much larger deterioration in protein intake compared to urban areas (Figure 4).

Afghans are often food insecure on multiple dimensions. 6 out of 10 Afghans are insecure on at least one measure of food security, 4 out of 10 are insecure on at least two measures, and 1 out of 5 Afghans are insecure on all three dimensions (Table 1).

Figure 3: Percentage of population with inadequate dietary diversity, 2007-2016

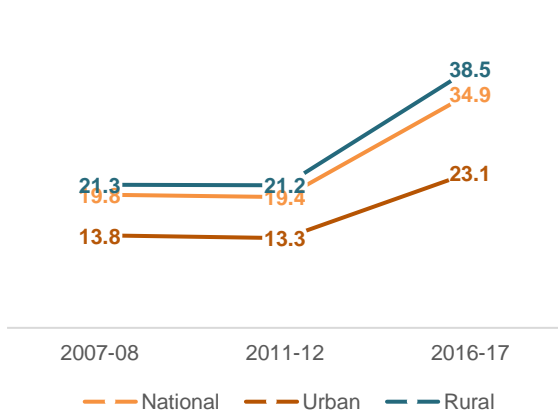
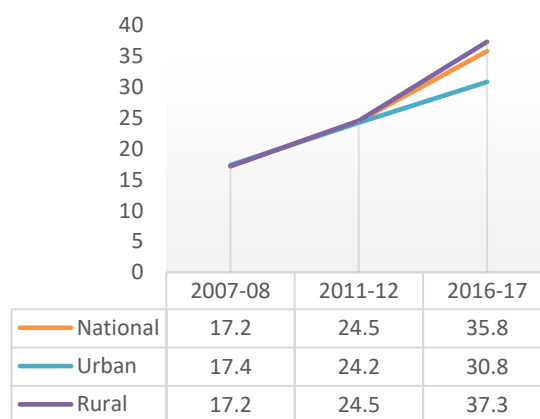


Figure 4: Percentage of population with protein deficiency, 2007-2016



Sources and notes: WB estimates based on NRVA 2007-08, NRVA 2011-12, and ALCS 2016-17

Table 1: Millions of Afghans with deficiencies in their diet, ALCS 2016-17

Inadequate dietary diversity and protein deficiency				
	--- Adequate diversity ---		--- Inadequate diversity ---	
Caloric deficiency	Not deficient in protein	Deficient in protein	Not deficient in protein	Deficient in protein
Not deficient in calories	11.8	0.4	3.4	0.4
Deficient in calories	2.6	4.2	0.9	5.5

Sources and notes: WB estimates based on ALCS 2016-17.

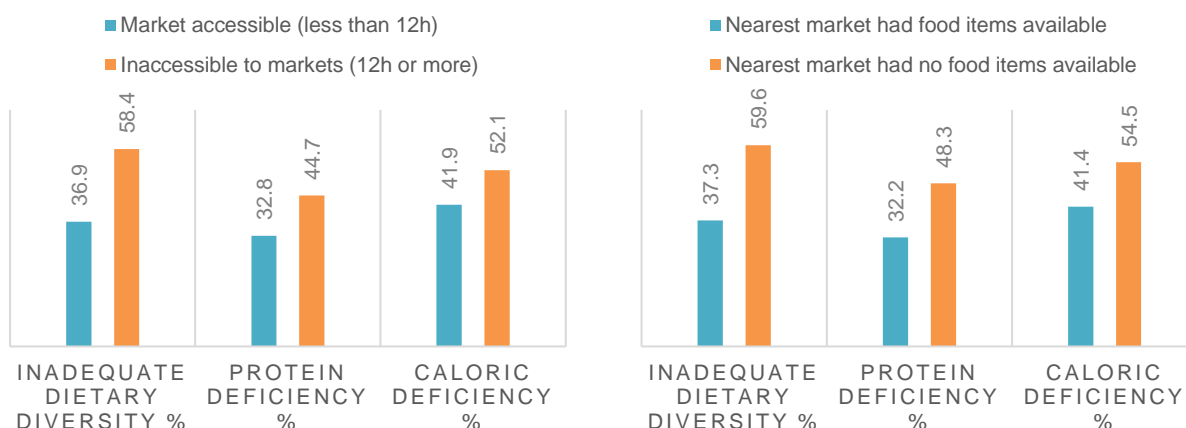
3. INACCESSIBILITY LEADS TO CHRONIC FOOD SECURITY RISKS

Households living in hard to reach areas face significantly higher risks of food security.

About 12 percent of the Afghan population lives in areas with low accessibility to markets (which is measured by whether households live more than 12 hours (by foot or bicycle) away from the nearest market or report having no market accessible) (Figure 5). These households do much worse in terms of food security outcomes. Over half of all households with low accessibility to markets are calorically deficient, 45 percent are protein deficient, and 60 percent have an inadequate dietary diversity. Similarly, households living in areas where the nearest market had no food items available (9 percent of all households) perform worse on all food security measures (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Food insecurity measures by market accessibility, 2016-17

Figure 6: Food insecurity measures by market food availability, 2016-17



Sources and notes: WB estimates based on ALCS 2016-17

Given the country’s geography, households who live in hard to reach areas will always face significantly higher risks of food insecurity either because they live far from markets or because their nearest market may not be well stocked. Indeed, 19 percent of households reported either lack of market access or lack of food availability in their nearest market. While household surveys cannot be sufficiently geographically disaggregated to identify specific districts of this type of chronic risk, some provinces stand out. For instance, more than 50 percent of interviewed clusters in Badghis, Sar-e-Pul, Samangan, and Badakhshan reported no market access, and this number increased to 90 percent in Ghor. More than 40 percent of interviewed clusters in Nooristan, Paktika, Ghor and Paktya reported no food availability; and 43 percent of interviewed clusters in Ghor and 12 percent of interviewed clusters in Nooristan reported having neither a market within 12 hours by foot or bicycle nor any food availability at the nearest market.

4. AFGHAN HOUSEHOLDS RELY OF SELF PRODUCTION OF FOOD AND IN TIMES OF DROUGHT, THEY CANNOT COMPENSATE THE LOSS OF SELF-PRODUCED FOOD THROUGH PURCHASES ON THE MARKET

Afghan households’ heavy reliance on self-production of food makes

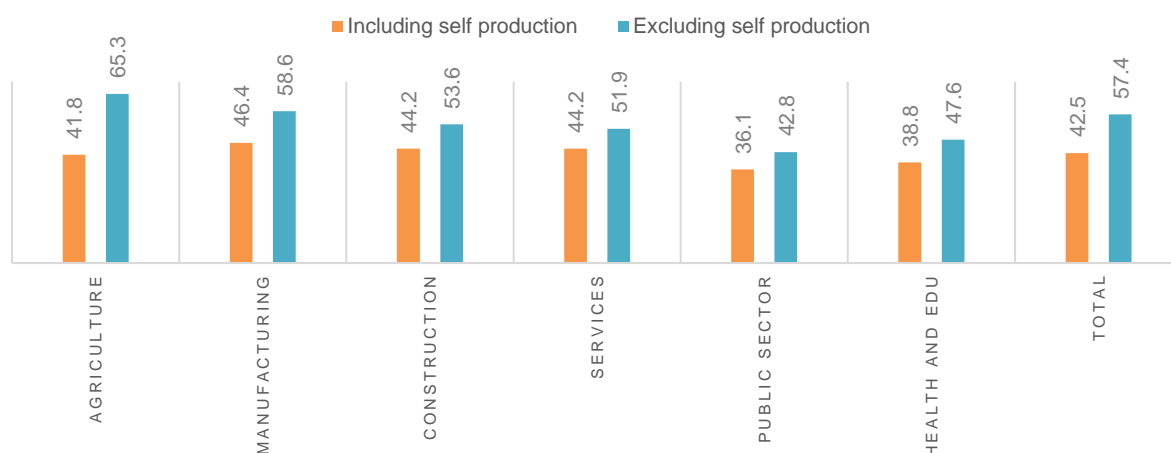
On average, 15 percent of food expenditures of Afghan households comes through self-production. This reliance is twice as high in certain provinces – Urozgan, Farah, Bamyan, Kunarha, Badghis, Ghor and Nooristan. Self-production of food is particularly important for

them doubly vulnerable to food insecurity risks by reducing their ability to produce food as well as their ability to generate income.

households dependent on vulnerable employment as own-account workers and unpaid family work, and for households whose primary source of livelihoods is farming or livestock. For the latter, one quarter of all food expenditures are sourced from self-production. Across the country, self-produced items are part of the staple food basket of households and include wheat, barley, maize, dried meat, milk and milk products, and eggs.

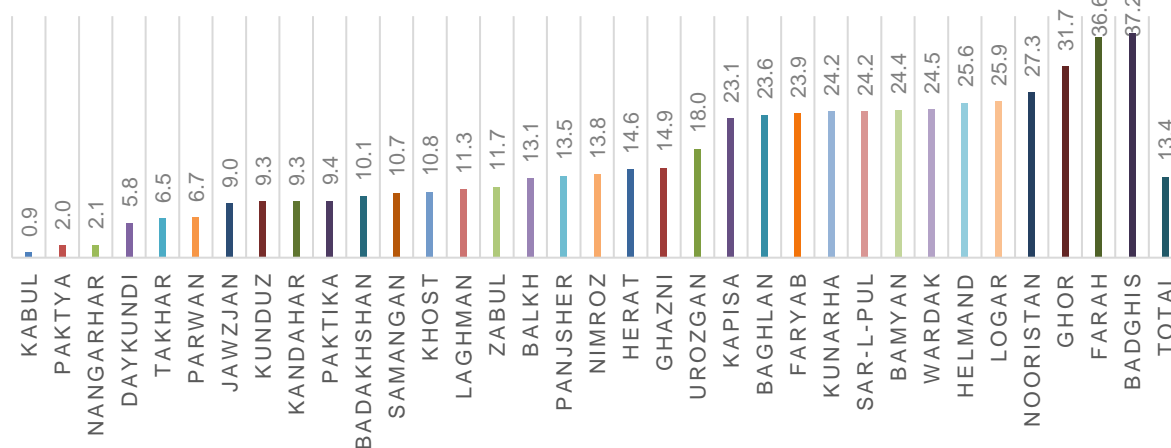
A simulation exercise suggests that overall caloric deficiency would increase to 57 percent for the country as a whole if self-production of food went to zero with no change in household incomes (Figure 7). In times of drought, agricultural households face a dual challenge, as their main source of livelihoods falters, and they lose a significant share of food consumption that is self-produced. For these households, even if food is available in local markets, their ability to generate incomes to purchase food becomes severely compromised. Indeed, agricultural households would face rates of food insecurity as high as 65 percent, and provinces where farming and livestock are the predominant sources of livelihoods such as Nooristan, Ghor, and Badghis (provinces with high reported lack of market access) would experience the highest increases in food insecurity (Figure 8)

Figure 7: Simulation: Estimated increases in caloric deficiency due to a complete loss of self-produced food, by main sector and province



Sources and notes: WB estimates based on ALCS 2016-17

Figure 8: Increase in caloric deficiency in the absence of self-production



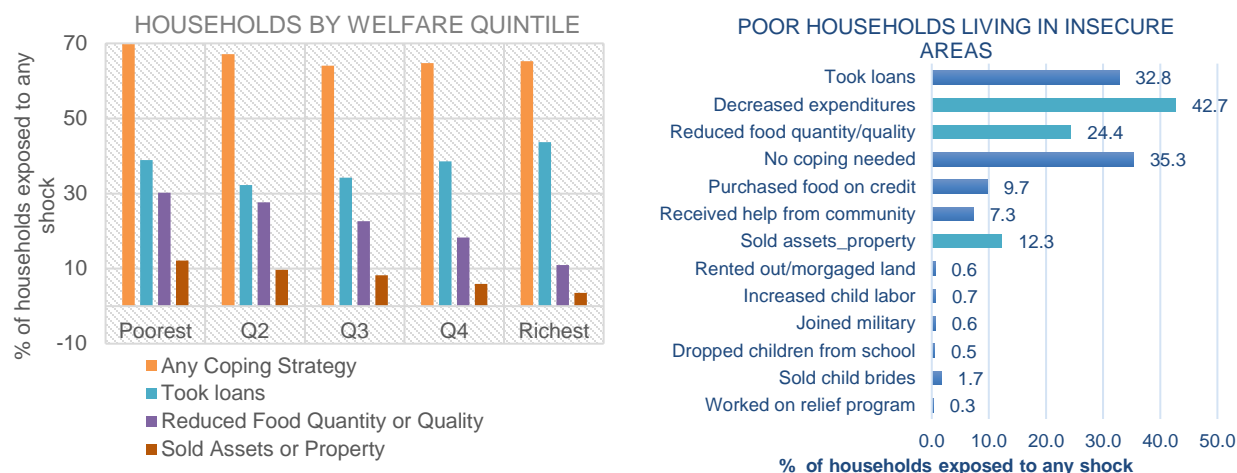
Sources and notes: WB estimates based on ALCS 2016-17

5. THE POOR ARE FORCED TO RELY ON COPING STRATEGIES THAT FURTHER ERODE RESILIENCE

Poor households disproportionately rely on reducing food quality or quantity or on selling assets or property, further compromising food security and resilience to shocks.

More than 65 percent of Afghan households adopted harmful coping strategies in the face of adverse shocks. While reliance on loans is widespread, poorer households disproportionately relied on reducing food quality or quantity or on selling assets or property, further compromising food security and resilience to shocks. A similar pattern is evident among poor households living in insecure areas.

Figure 9: Coping strategies, for households exposed to a shock, 2016-17



Sources and notes: WB estimates based on ALCS 2016-17

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The current drought exacerbates already existing severe food insecurity in Afghanistan. In the short term, humanitarian assistance can reduce the urgent need for food but in the medium to long term, food security objectives have to be incorporated into national policies on poverty reduction strategies. Strategies aiming at reducing hunger and poverty need to consider impacts at the national, sub-national, household and individual level. These findings highlight the need for policy action along the following lines:

1. An adaptive safety nets program that is sensitive to seasonality in hunger and livelihoods, geographic need and targets specific vulnerabilities.
2. Identification of communities chronically underserved by markets or inaccessible, which could be prioritized for spatial targeting and tertiary roads improvements in the short run, as safety nets are scaled up.
3. In the medium term, diversification of livelihood opportunities in rural areas and investments in improving yields, livestock and livestock product quality.
4. Medium-term interventions to support improved nutrition and care for vulnerable groups including health campaigns for pregnant women and mothers, nutritional supplements for mothers and children, targeted support for the elderly and the disabled, and school feeding interventions.