

Food-Needs Assessment DARFUR

Economic Security Unit

International Committee of the Red Cross



ICRC

Khartoum, Republic of the Sudan

October 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2004, an economic security team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) assessed the food-security situation of the resident population in rural areas affected by the conflict in Northern, Western and Southern Darfur.

The present report outlines the expected immediate and longer-term food-assistance needs and proposes a course of action for the ICRC.

Twenty villages/communities throughout Northern, Western and Southern Darfur were assessed. The situation assessed in the survey was found to be alarming as coping mechanisms developed over years of drought and conflict had been nearly exhausted.

Most of the rural communities assessed were found by the survey to be suffering from food shortages, which are expected to become worse in the longer term. On average, the communities had planted less than one third of the usual crop areas. Yields are likely to be severely affected by drought in certain parts of the country. Levels of physical insecurity were found to be the main cause of food shortages as people are reluctant to venture outside their villages for fear of attack and so cannot reach their fields. No obvious differences were detected between Northern, Western and Southern Darfur.

Resident rural communities were seen to be spending most of their resources on buying food. In many cases, wild food constituted the bulk of the diet for communities not receiving humanitarian food assistance.

The current food gap may diminish somewhat by November/December 2004 if communities gain physical access to their plots for harvesting. This will depend on the general level of security. However, in any case harvests will not be abundant and most of the limited yields of staple crops harvested by rural communities will have been consumed by January/February 2005 in the case of Western Darfur and March/April 2005 in Northern and Southern Darfur. The resulting food gap will last until the next harvest at the end of 2005.

Farmers, pastoralists and nomads have also suffered large livestock losses as a result of the conflict. The exact figures are difficult to estimate at this time.

The disruption of traditional migration routes and the inaccessibility of vast grazing areas will jeopardize livestock production over the medium term. Most herds in Darfur were seen to be migrating southwards in search of safety, whereas they should have been moving north at this time of the year. Livestock mortality rates had increased as a result of overcrowding and the security situation, which prevented veterinary personnel and vaccines from reaching many areas.

The present report's findings validate the ICRC's current food-assistance strategy, which aims to help residents and returnees in rural areas in particular, in a bid to prevent further migration, in search of assistance, towards urban centres, displaced persons' camps or Chad.

The ICRC urges all parties to the conflict to take appropriate measures to protect the civilian population from the effects of hostilities and to prevent further deterioration of the already alarming food situation in Darfur. Insecurity is the root cause of the collapse of agriculture, pastoralism and trade in Darfur. It is essential that all parties to the conflict abide by their obligation to protect the lives and physical integrity of the civilian population by providing security and facilitating the free and safe movement of persons, livestock and goods so as to preserve essential economic activities.

1. Assessment approach

1.1 Village identification

The villages to be assessed in the September survey were selected according to the following criteria:

- **rural areas with resident population** (no internally displaced people in camps, no urban population);
- **areas directly affected by conflict;**
- villages located in a variety of **different Food Economy Zones;**
- **no previous assessments** carried out by the ICRC or other humanitarian agency;
- **no humanitarian assistance received to date ;**
- areas **accessible** in safety and within reasonable travel time (maximum 1-2 days to reach the village)

The team aimed at conducting 15-20 assessments in total, divided equally by region.

1.2 Semi-directive interviews

Focus-group discussions with men concentrated on agriculture/livestock, household/community economy and demographic information, while focus-group discussions with women centred on agriculture, small-scale trade and nutrition.

1.3. Key sources of information

Background documents were available on Food Economy Zones from Save the Children-UK for Northern Darfur, as well as some reports on Darfur as a whole by the World Food Programme, the ICRC and Save the Children UK. However, most of the information available concerned internally displaced persons.

2. General findings

2.1 Food Economy Zones covered and time constraints involved

Over a three-week period, the team assessed 20 villages/communities, comprising six in Northern Darfur, nine in Western Darfur and five in Southern Darfur. It also conducted quick post-distribution monitoring in Western Darfur. All assessments concerned the residents of rural areas and no internally displaced persons in camps. Different communities were involved: 18 of African and two of Arab origin.

In Northern Darfur the following Food Economy Zones were assessed:

- goz (sandy soil areas)
- wadi (areas around watercourses that fill after rainfall)
- tombac (tobacco-growing area)
- agro-migrant (itinerant farmworker) area

In Western Darfur only agro-pastoralists were assessed, including a semi-nomadic camp (i.e. sedentary agro-pastoralist communities where the men move with the herds for three-month periods).

In Southern Darfur the following Food Economy Zones were assessed:

- agro-pastoralist in semi-arid savannah
- agro-pastoralist with high production
- agro-pastoralist + cash crop (mainly groundnut)

The time spent carrying out the assessments ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the distances the team could travel in one day while still guaranteeing a safe and timely return to an ICRC base or a facility run by the Sudanese Red Crescent or equivalent.

2.2 General findings on incidents and population movements

The assessment revealed that most of the villages visited had first been attacked in July-September 2003 (in Northern and Western Darfur) or a few months later (in Southern Darfur). Since then, many villages had again been targeted, and most were still suffering recurrent security incidents. Of the 20 villages assessed, 17 had been looted and/or their populations had suffered physical injury.

Most reports followed a similar pattern.

Each affected village assessed was abandoned after the attacks for a longer or shorter period. During the survey, the team observed a large number of unoccupied villages throughout Darfur. The number of returnees per village assessed varied from only a few families (mostly women and/or elderly) to 100% of the households present before the conflict. However, most of the villages were still not fully occupied.

In **Northern** and **Southern Darfur**, people who had fled their villages and subsequently returned had, during their displacement, mainly remained in the environs, either hiding in the mountains or living in larger towns nearby.

Many people in the villages of **Western Darfur** had either gone to Chad as refugees or had sought refuge in nearby towns. The majority of returnees or "partial returnees" (people returning to the villages during the daytime) were women and children. Most had left their villages for extended periods of time (months). It is thought that most absent families are either still in Chad, have sought refuge in the mountains, are living in camps for internally

displaced people, are scattered around nearby towns or (to a lesser extent) are staying with relatives. Children are kept in hiding places – they were not present in the villages surveyed.

The team gathered that, throughout Darfur, the factors preventing people from returning were: fear, inability to secure food independently once back in the villages, or the desire to protect their remaining assets (for instance livestock) in some undisclosed location.

2.3 Food economy

2.3.1 Food Economy Zones

Most villages surveyed relied on agro-pastoralist activities. Most of the Darfur population is rural and supplements traditional crop-growing with livestock. The main crop is millet, followed by sorghum. Groundnuts, tobacco, vegetables and watermelons are the main cash crops. Most crops are rain-fed (with occasional irrigation in Northern Darfur).

Despite differing Food Economy Zones, each with its own ways of coping with drought or conflict, the team saw that no particular zone was coping with the current situation better than the others. The *wadi* areas were slightly better off – especially when the *wadis* were nearby – thanks to better access to ground water for crops.

The factor that determines the vulnerability to food shortages of the different Food Economy Zones is the degree of physical insecurity in and around each village. If certain villages manage better than others to obtain food, this is mainly because larger nearby towns provide 'safe havens'.

Throughout Darfur, security incidents still occur and this directly determines the level of food insecurity in each community.

2.3.2 Planting, surface and yield estimates

It is estimated that, on average, the assessed communities this year **planted between 5% and 30%** of what they would in a normal year. In Western Darfur this percentage was lower than in Northern and Southern Darfur.

There were two exceptions in the west of Northern Darfur, where two communities visited estimated that they had planted almost 50% of the usual amount.

If communities were able, they mostly planted millet and, to a lesser extent, sorghum.

The main factors limiting the forthcoming harvest are as follows:

- Less land has been planted owing to the security situation.
- Seeds are scarce because household stocks have largely been looted.
- Lack of appropriate tools.
- Lack of access to plots of land for the purpose of weeding (insecurity).
- Poor rainfall and long dry spells. Especially in the north, and to a lesser extent in the west, rainfall in 2004 has been less than average. (This trend can be confirmed by data for 2001-2004 provided by Save the Children-UK – see Figure 1.)
- Some communities said that crops had been destroyed by locusts, but the assessment did not confirm that these insects had originated from the plague in Chad. The team felt this was a locally recurring problem.

Households are expected to face poor harvests: on average only 10% of normal yields in Western Darfur, 14% in Southern Darfur and 20% in Northern Darfur.

These figures indicate that people living in the rural areas surveyed will face a severe food shortage starting first in Western Darfur (January/February 2005) and then in Northern and Southern Darfur (March/April 2005).

Households will have limited means of responding to this food deficit:

- Families' income is already very meagre. They will therefore not be able to buy enough food to meet all their needs, even if it is available at the market (most likely at exorbitant prices).
- The expected low levels of cultivation (also among richer farmers in 2005 owing to insecurity) will further decrease employment opportunities for the rural poor.

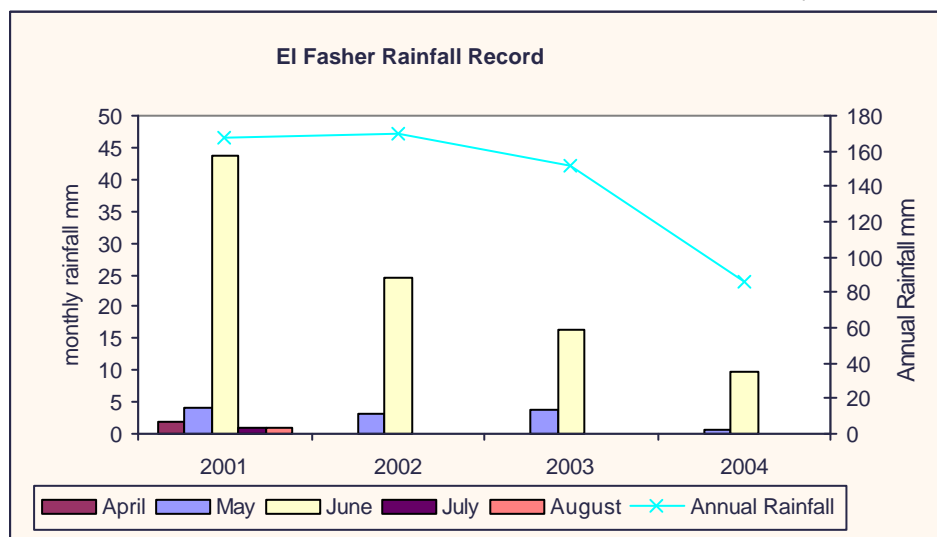
The effect of drought is considerable in Northern and Southern Darfur:

Two villages in Southern Darfur that were not directly affected by the conflict planted the same surface and had the same number of seeds as in other years. They nevertheless expected that their harvest would be around 50% less than in an average year.

However, drought-affected communities throughout Darfur invariably stressed that if drought had been their only problem this year, they could have coped with the food shortage. They would still have been able to use milk from their livestock, de-stock their herds or go to market to buy food or look for work. Moreover, fetching water or collecting firewood/grass or wild food would not have been as dangerous an activity as it is.

Figure 1

Rainfall record 2001 – 2004 for El Fasher in Northern Darfur (SC-UK, Northern Darfur)



According to the communities visited, **physical insecurity and loss of assets are the main factors undermining their coping strategies.**

2.3.3 Food sources

Traditionally, the main sources of food for households are their own agricultural production (45–60%), their livestock (10–30%) and market purchases (15–30%). In a typical year, wild

food accounts for 5-10% of the standard diet. Millet is the main staple crop and sorghum the secondary one. Both are used for consumption within the family and as a cash crop.

At present the major source of food is wild food (35-85%), while the percentage of food bought at the market has also increased (40%). Another source of food is community solidarity. Sending children out to beg is on the increase (5-20%).

2.3.4 Income-expenditure

The main source of income for households in the assessed areas is their own agricultural production (40-60%). Livestock sales generate between 10 and 30%. Income from these two sources is supplemented by the sale of charcoal, firewood and grass (0-15%), casual work (0-20%) and small-scale trading (0-10%).

Income from agricultural and livestock production has now dropped to almost nothing (livestock being sold only in emergencies). Income from gathering grass and wood has increased to 20-80% of total income while seasonal labour has increased (to 30-50%). However, this cannot make up for the income lost from agriculture and livestock.

As for expenditure, most of the income (around 70-100%) of the resident rural population is currently spent on food. In previous years this percentage was much lower.

In an average year the largest part of the cash (20-35%) per household is used to purchase basic food commodities (meat, oil, tea, sugar, salt, dried tomatoes, etc). Education and health represent 10-20%. Traditional medicine is sometimes used to treat illnesses.

Household items account for only 10-15% of expenditure. The main items bought are cloth/clothes, followed by cooking pots and material to repair and maintain the house. The proportion spent on taxes (6-10%) and charity (2-5%) are part of normal expenditure, but varies according to production.

At present there is an important cash deficit and most people do not have access to health care and education and cannot buy cloth/clothes. Another reason why less money is being spent on health and education is the lack of health-care staff and teachers as a result of the conflict.

2.3.5 Livestock

The survey team observed that no households were restocking their herds. Some communities mentioned that herds had been seen in areas where they never had been before. Occasionally, people said that their crops had been trampled and/or eaten by those herds. During the assessment, all communities mentioned substantial numbers of looted cattle, goats and sheep.

All the villages visited (except two in Southern Darfur not directly affected by the conflict) reported that their livestock had been looted (70-100%). However, it was impossible to cross-check this information.

Villagers reported major losses of camels, horses and cows. However, most of the villages had managed to save at least one donkey and one to five sheep and goats per household.

The team was told three things. Firstly that people prioritized the saving of goats over sheep as the former are less susceptible to disease and drought, even though mutton was generally preferred to goat meat. Secondly that sheep were therefore sold more often. Thirdly that the

loss of poultry during the conflict stemmed partially from a disease outbreak. The team was not in a position to verify these statements directly.

In Southern Darfur huge concentrations of cattle were observed (more than usual at this time of year), since they cannot move north-westwards for security reasons. A similar situation was noted by an ICRC livestock specialist in Northern Darfur.

2.3.6 Seasonal calendar

Most communities farm according to the following calendar: planting in July/August, then weeding, then harvesting in November/December and sometimes January. Vegetables normally need less time to ripen than cereals.

Figure 2

Average calendar for

Northern/Western Darfur

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
millet/sorghum/					Land preparation		Planting				harvesting	
Vegetables							first	second	weeding			

All the communities assessed had been unable to carry out substantial planting and for the most part the weeding season had been either missed completely or that activity had been impeded by security concerns. In Western Darfur one village was seen pre-harvesting since the millet crops were dying prematurely.

In many villages in Northern and Western Darfur the team saw thinly planted and/or unweeded plots, millet not reaching its usual height and, occasionally, dying crops.

2.3.7 Prices

Throughout Darfur the team assessed prices reported by villagers and occasionally directly observed on local markets. Almost without exception the assessment showed an **increase of 150–300% in the price** of main food commodities (especially millet and sorghum, but also vegetables) compared with prices registered in September 2003. Meanwhile sugar prices had on the whole remained stable. Only in one nomadic community in Western Darfur did prices seem not to have changed much since last year.

According to Save the Children-UK, the current price of millet has reached 9,500 SDD (95,000 Ls per sack) which is a record high since 1994.

Save the Children-UK staff in Northern Darfur also reported that prices differed from region to region. There are so-called “demand or supply” pockets in Northern Darfur. Livestock-production areas have high cereal prices and low sheep and cattle prices since transport and trade are limited. The same applies to cereal-producing areas where livestock prices are relatively high. However, in general the survey team concluded that, at most markets throughout Darfur, cereal prices were very high and the livestock/grain ratio showed that more livestock was now needed to buy the same amount of grain.

The team received information (from villagers, truck drivers, ICRC health delegates) that in some parts of Darfur the transport of food and fuel to certain areas is prohibited. The team was not able to verify these claims.

Truck drivers travelling from government-controlled regions or towns through unsafe areas use armed escorts, whom they must pay. This further increases the retail price of the commodities.

Before the conflict, truck drivers would bring commodities to rural markets for sale and, at the same time, buy up surplus local produce. As this is now scarce, they have to return empty. The resulting low profit combined with the security risk discourages them from going to rural areas.

2.3.8 Coping

Rural residents said that they had all **reduced their daily food consumption from a normal three meals to one-to-two**. Most had been doing this since the start of the conflict a year ago.

Consumption of wild foods is not unusual and some communities reported a baseline intake of 5–15% of their diet in normal years. However, the majority of villagers are **now getting 35–85% of their food intake in the form of wild foods**. Communities that received relief assistance topped up their diets with wild foods, since most of the relief was insufficient in quantity.

Most of the resident rural communities that had not received relief were getting more than 50% of their total food intake from wild foods. The growth of some wild foods in more northern areas of Darfur was also affected by drought.

By means of household visits, cross-sectional walks through villages and the discrepancy between men's and women's accounts of their current diets, the team concluded that **men have priority when it comes to the quantity and quality of food** (see section on nutrition).

Women take enormous physical risks to find and gather wild food, firewood and grass. Often left with no other option, women search for wild foods in surrounding areas and regularly have to spend many hours to collect enough for one meal. One community reported that sometimes the women stayed out for two to three days and would return only once they had gathered enough wild food.

Women also risk physical harm when going to the markets or fetching water. It was generally felt that whole communities took many risks in order to obtain food, whether they were carrying out agricultural activities in areas with a history of incidents, collecting wild food, grass and firewood or carrying out small-scale trade at the marketplace.

In most communities the traditionally strong charity system has collapsed, although people still share as much as they can. This sharing ranges from vegetables to cooking utensils and jerrycans for fetching water.

Three communities in the north of Western Darfur reported that begging in the bigger towns (especially by the elderly and children) brought in some food or cash.

If people had the opportunity to sell an animal to obtain food they did so. However, many villagers said that this option was very limited (animals were in short supply as a result of looting and the hiding of herds). In any case this was done only as a last resort owing to low livestock prices.

Many villages in Western Darfur had planted staple crops inside the village compounds themselves. According to the residents this was very uncommon but felt it was now necessary because of the physical insecurity outside the village boundaries.

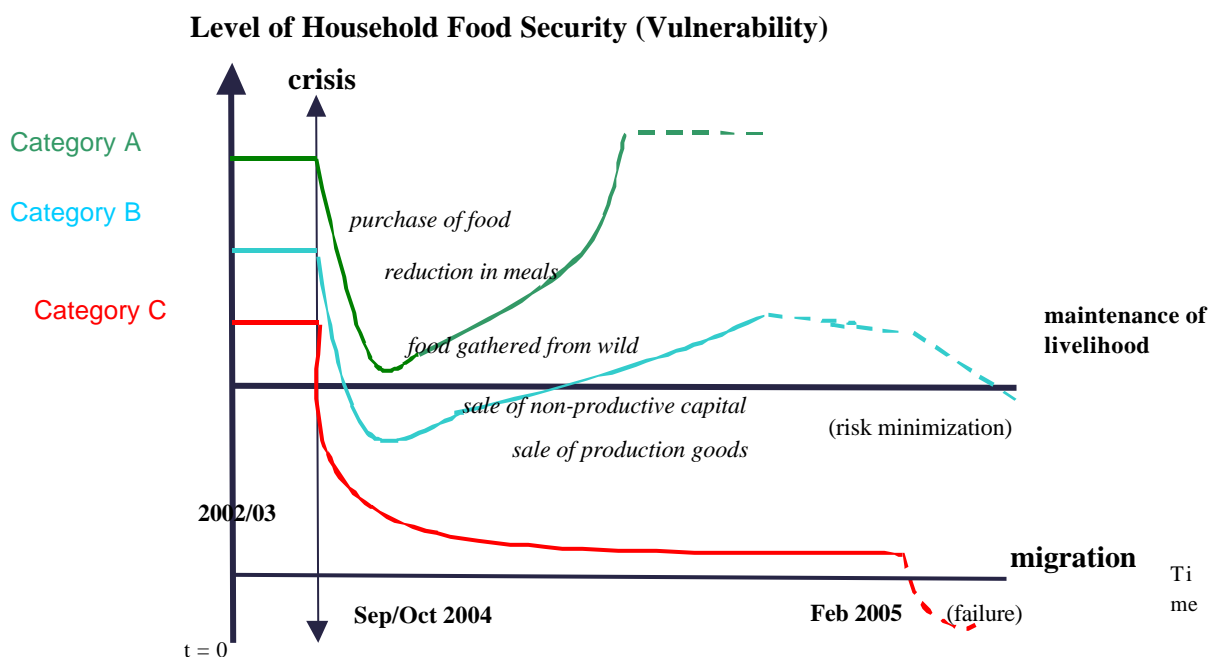
With the exception of Saraf Umra (west of Northern Darfur), wealth-ranking was less visible in the community. All communities assessed were deeply marked by the crisis, and the looting of assets and storage facilities had affected all households. Those formerly better off had now become middle-income or poor households. The communities felt that most people were now equal when it came to available coping strategies.

2.3.9 Food gap

The team estimates that, at this moment, the majority of people surveyed belong in the **continuum between categories B and C** (see Figure 3). Harvest yields will temporarily reduce food insecurity at community level in November, December and January. However, by January/February, many communities in Western Darfur will need food assistance, and this need will persist until the end of 2005 since the first possible harvest will not be before November 2005.

For Northern and Southern Darfur the food gap will occur later because of better yields in absolute terms. It is expected to open in March/April 2005 and last until the end of 2005.

Figure 3



Note: Communities belonging to **category A** were hardly seen by the team. These communities can deal with a crisis brought on by drought or conflict by means of the usual coping strategies and will recover after the harvest. Communities belonging to categories B and C are currently suffering from a food gap and are stretching their coping strategies to their limits. The harvest yields will temporarily alleviate their food gap but the yields will be so limited that soon the communities will not be able to secure their food supply and some will migrate (category C), being unable to survive otherwise.

If food assistance is not forthcoming, certain communities will start to migrate towards urban centres from February 2005 onwards.

2.3.10 Seeds and tools

The survey found that, in a normal year, the population does not need to buy much seed at the market. Moreover, they have a clear preference for their own seed since they know its performance.

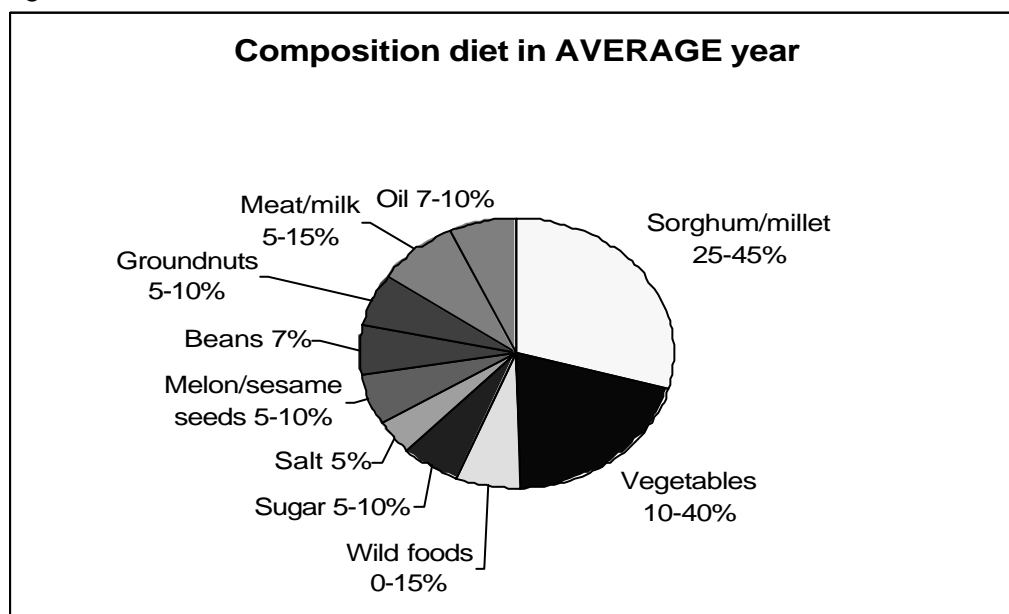
All communities assessed were already lacking sufficient seed for sowing in May-July 2004. Moreover, planting was hampered by the loss of tools and draught animals.

The forthcoming harvest is going to be very poor and almost 100% of the production will be consumed. The disruption of trade networks and lack of cash will make it difficult to acquire seed locally. As a result, both seed and agricultural tools will be in short supply for the planting season in May-July 2005. Given the continued insecurity, residents will face difficulties in accessing their fields, which means they will not be able to plant as much as in other years, even if they do have enough seed.

2.4 Nutrition

The diet in average years was varied and consisted mainly of staple foods (millet, sorghum) and vegetables such as okra, onion (*basal*) and dried tomatoes (*salsa*).

Figure 4



(This pie-chart of diet composition refers to volume of food consumption, not caloric intake.)

In each village, the community stated that its current food intake was substantially lower than before. On average the villagers reported that their **current food intake was reduced to 35–45% of what it had been in normal years**. This information was consistent from village to village, yet in no case did the team find marasmic individuals. No information was available on the nutritional status of the assessed villagers prior to the conflict. The team

suspects that, to a certain extent, this discrepancy might be due to an under-estimation of actual intake. Many assessed communities stressed the **lack of oil** in their diet.

Men have privileged access to food and are likely to have more cereals in their diet than women. These are sometimes mixed with wild food (for instance *koreib/abu sabe*). If protein sources such as meat are available to the household, the men will receive the lion's share if not all.

The nutritional quality of the food was hard to measure during the assessment, but wild foods such as *mugheit* are risky since they are toxic if insufficient water is used in its preparation. In addition, some wild foods require long preparation (separation of grain from grass, boiling, extensive washing, underground fermentation, etc).

In one community in Western Darfur, lack of food forced people to preserve the *mugheit*-producing trees, which could therefore not be used as firewood, this while physical insecurity was making it difficult to collect enough firewood.

Owing to the lack of livestock, the normal **intake of milk** (and meat) by all agro-pastoral communities **has fallen dramatically**. Children in particular suffer as a result. The team saw **few children** – apart from suckling infants – during the village visits, and no adolescent boys. Nor did they observe any marasmic children.

There are various explanations for the absence of children in the assessed villages. They may have been out fetching water or collecting wood or grass, or engaged in small-scale trade elsewhere; or they may have been hiding in the mountains or in surrounding villages with their mothers.

The team was not asked to assess systematically the nutritional status of the rural residents. However, judging from the quality and quantity of the current diet, the team suspects **deficiencies in both caloric intake and the level of micronutrients**.

Women and children especially are the subject of great concern. Close observation is therefore needed during future food distributions and assessments.

2.5 Main current problems

When asked to state the current problems affecting the community, the following were highlighted:

- insecurity due to the current situation
- food shortages
- lack of cooking utensils
- lack of cloth/clothes
- lack of matting, blankets
- lack of shelter
- lack of access to health care/drugs
- lack of access to education
- lack of access to water (poor quality, insufficient quantity, great distances)

Without exception the communities mentioned **insecurity** and **food shortage** as their main problems. Next their principal concerns were **access to water and health care as well as lack of essential household items such as cloth, clothes and cooking utensils**. Women most often emphasized the lack of cloth, clothes and cooking utensils, while men more frequently cited lack of water, health care and education.

3. Main Conclusions

3.1 Scale and causes of food insecurity

In all regions visited by the team, **food insecurity was an obvious and vast problem among the resident rural population**. With a few exceptions, **the coping mechanisms were about to be exhausted** and in most villages people did not have sufficient food or a balanced diet. These deficiencies will impede normal health, growth and development, especially in women and children.

The team concludes that **Darfur is experiencing a long-term major food crisis**.

The causes are linked to all aspects of the food-insecurity scale: food availability, access to food and, to a lesser extent, food utilization.

Food availability is limited by the following:

- large-scale shrinkage of the planting surface (smaller areas are planted owing to insecurity and yields are further limited by drought)
- other aspects of physical insecurity
- lack of seeds
- poor to moderate crop performance
- inadequate rainfall
- insufficient weeding
- lack of appropriate tools and draught animals to help in cultivation
- fields damaged by fires (both conflict-related and accidental) or crop-eating by transiting livestock herds
- limited availability of certain food products on the market (particularly in Western Darfur)
- limited or total absence of food assistance in the area

Food access is limited by the following:

- restricted physical access to markets
- restricted direct access to planted plots
- reduced purchasing power
- fewer assets for barter (as a result of looting)
- higher cereals prices
- impediments to paid employment because men's access to work is hindered by the conflict and the many internally displaced persons in the towns constitute a large supply of cheap labour

Inadequate utilization of food due to the following:

- wild foods like *mugheit* are toxic and demand substantial quantities of water and long cooking
- probable poor nutritional quality of many wild foods
- prioritization of men (men eat the better food products available at household level)

In most areas, rural communities are currently affected by both drought and conflict but it is the latter that **prevents those communities from using their normal drought-time coping strategies**.

3.2 Food gap

Where cultivation was possible in 2004, communities planted millet and, to a lesser extent, sorghum.

The estimated **crop yields for 2004** vary from **5% to 20%** of average yields prior to the conflict. Food shortages could begin first in Western Darfur (January/February 2005) and then in Northern and Southern Darfur (March/April 2005).

3.3 Coping

At present the resident rural population is putting **most of its resources into purchasing food commodities (between 70% and 100%)**. Most of the resident rural communities that have not received relief food are getting more than 50% of their intake from wild foods.

The observed coping mechanisms are inadequate to safeguard a minimal level of food security. Most people have no assets left with which to acquire food.

All communities state that they are eating less than 50% of their normal daily consumption. However, no marasmic individuals were observed during the team's assessments in the villages.

3.4. Specific vulnerability

The present food economy in rural agro-pastoralist communities relies heavily on women. They **take high risks to obtain food (directly or indirectly)**. In addition, as mentioned above, their own diet is inadequate.

3.5. Seeds and tools

In 2005 rural resident communities affected by the conflict will **all lack adequate quantities of seeds** for cereals and vegetables.

Undoubtedly communities need **agricultural tools** (including ploughs). However, if security does not improve, the distribution of equipment and seed will not be enough to enable farmers and their families to improve their food security.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Food assistance helps prevent further distress migration and encourages the return of internally displaced people. **It therefore remains necessary to furnish regular food assistance for resident rural populations, allowing them fully to meet their needs. The provision of agricultural assets likewise remains vital and should be maintained throughout 2005.**
- While the need for direct food assistance might temporarily drop after the harvest, it should be maintained throughout the "better" period in order to free resources for the acquisition of other minimal vital assets.
- The loss/lack of assets needs to be compensated. Therefore, assistance to the residents of rural areas affected by the conflict should include – no later than early 2005 – **essential household items**, especially cooking utensils and clothes/cloth.
- Residents of rural areas affected by the conflict will have insufficient seed for the May-July 2005 planting season. The quantities of distributed **staple seed** should depend on how many fields are accessible to the population at the time of planting. Security will determine the extent to which fields can be cultivated. **Cash-crop seed** (groundnuts, okra, tomato, kerkadeh, watermelon) for the winter season should also be distributed in 2005. **Agricultural tools** (including ploughs) must be distributed with the seed.
- **Systematic and regular information about the nutritional status of the assisted population needs to be gathered.** Village assessments should regularly include some simple anthropometrical measurements. Assessments should also employ methods for gathering information on (potential) micronutrient deficiencies.
- The ICRC urges all parties to the conflict to take appropriate measures to protect the civilian population from the effects of the hostilities and to prevent a further deterioration of the already alarming food situation in Darfur. Insecurity is the root cause of the collapse of agriculture, pastoralism and trade in Darfur. **It is essential that all parties to the conflict abide by their obligations to protect the lives and physical integrity of the civilian population by providing security and facilitating the free and safe movement of persons, livestock and goods so as to preserve essential economic activities.**