

Food Insecurity in Rwanda

Food security is a problem for many people in Rwanda. In 2012 a national survey found that in the 12 months before the survey, 51 percent of households had experienced difficulty in accessing sufficient food¹. This included people who had experienced either:

- re-occurring seasonal problems accessing enough food;
- unusual acute problems accessing enough food; or
- chronic problems accessing enough food for most of the year.

“The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food”².

Causes of food insecurity

There are many causes of food insecurity. In Rwanda, poverty is a significant challenge. According to the Rwandan food security survey, “poor households simply cannot afford to access enough nutritious food to live a healthy active life or to invest in their livelihood. They are more vulnerable to high food prices – especially during the lean season when their own stocks have run dry. And they have no monetary buffer to protect them from the consequences of shocks such as drought, flooding, illness, crop disease etc.”³

In addition to acute and chronic food insecurity, many Rwandans also face seasonal food insecurity. This is referred to as the “lean season”. The lean season is the period just prior to harvest when people start to run out of food crops stored from the previous harvest. The majority of Rwandan farmers have only very small plots of land – 26 percent of household farms are less than 0.2ha in size⁴. The farms are also often on very steep slopes, prone to erosion and low soil fertility. These factors combine to limit the amount of food crops that can be harvested.

When people are unable to produce and store enough crops from one harvest to provide them with sufficient food until the next harvest, one option is to buy additional food from local markets. With the increase in demand during the lean season, prices rise. This makes it more difficult for the poorest households to buy enough, good quality food. “Prices of the main food crops in Rwanda vary seasonally; the general pattern is always an increase in prices up to the harvest and then a gradual drop.”⁵

Rwanda’s seasonal agricultural calendar

Almost all crops in Rwanda are rain-fed. This makes the pattern of rainfall very important for when crops can be planted and harvested⁶. The calendar below outlines key periods in the typical Rwandan growing cycle, which affect the seasonal availability of food crops.

Rainfall peaks												
Planting												
Harvest												
Lean seasons												
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

Source: adapted from MINAGRI NISR and WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey: Rwanda 2012, pg 15 based on information from FEWS NET available at: www.fews.net/east-africa/rwanda



For you to do

1. Kigali is the capital of Rwanda, and is located near the centre of the country. Using the information provided below about the average annual temperature and rainfall in Kigali:

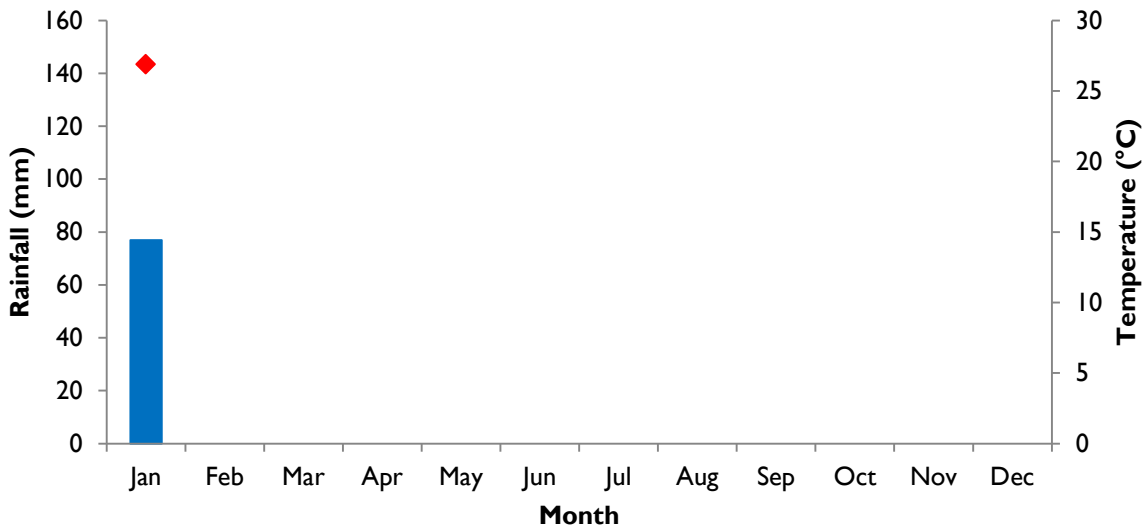
- a. Create a climate graph for Kigali using the template provided.

Average Temperature (°C) and Average Rainfall (mm) – Kigali, Rwanda 1° 57' S, 30° 3' E

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature	26.9	27.4	26.9	26.2	25.9	26.4	27.1	28.0	28.2	27.2	26.1	26.4
Rainfall	76.9	91.0	114.2	154.2	88.1	18.6	11.4	31.1	69.6	105.7	112.7	77.4

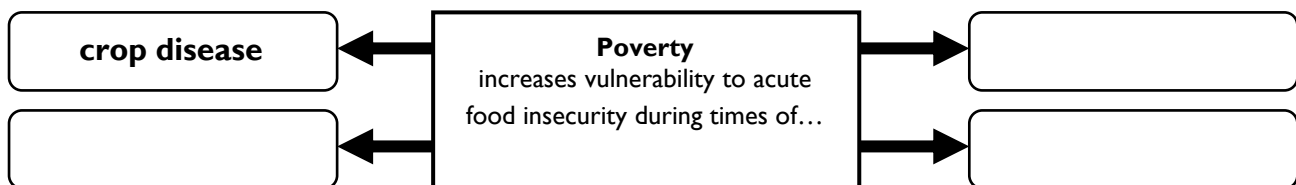
Source: World Meteorological Organization, data provided by Rwanda Meteorological Service, available at: worldweather.wmo.int/127/c00254.htm [accessed February 2014]

Title: _____



- b. Identify the five wettest months and mark these on the seasonal agricultural calendar on the previous page.
- c. Write a short paragraph explaining the relationship between the pattern of rainfall, planting and harvest of crops, and the lean seasons of food insecurity in Rwanda.

2. Give three examples of situations where poverty can make households vulnerable to acute food insecurity.



¹ MINAGRI NISR and WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey: Rwanda 2012 – Executive Brief, pg 10

² WHO, Food Security, www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en [accessed February 2014]

³ Ibid., pg 7

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ MINAGRI NISR and WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey: Rwanda 2012, pg 24

⁶ Ibid.,pg 12