



LIBERIA COMPREHENSIVE FOOD  
SECURITY AND NUTRITION SURVEY  
(CFSNS) JUNE 2013



# TEN YEARS OF FRAGILE PROGRESS

Liberia is a low income country heavily reliant on international assistance for revenue and human resources because of many years of civil war, which resulted in economic collapse and infrastructural dilapidation. The country ranks 174 out of 187 in the UNDP 2012 Human Development Index. Gross national income per capita is US\$480 and the national poverty headcount ratio is 83.9 % (UNDP HDI, 2011).

Improved security and the period of recovery ushered in by the 2003 peace agreements have supported economic growth rates averaging 6% a year from 2004 – 2011. This growth was driven by iron ore and rubber exports as well as increased timber production. Inflation, which fell to 7.5% in 2010 due to lower fuel and food prices, rose sharply to 8.5% in 2013 (IMF, 2013).

## Box 1: CFSNS 2012 in numbers

- 15 counties, 130 districts and Monrovia were surveyed
- Data collection took place over 82 days (from 25 August to 15 November 2012)
- 13,719 randomly selected households were interviewed
- Anthropometric (nutrition) measurements of 11,133 children (6 to 59 months) were taken
- 154 traders were interviewed for market information.

Liberia is richly endowed with water, mineral resources, forests and a climate favorable to agriculture, with agricultural production making up 26% of direct and 27% of indirect gross GDP through other services (National Rice Development Strategy 2011). The agricultural sector is also the primary livelihood source for two-thirds (67%) of the population, chiefly at smallholder and subsistence level as well as cash crop plantation (rubber, palm oil, cocoa, sugarcane and coffee). 71% of farming households engage in rice production, and 40% in cassava (National Rice Development strategy 2011). However, low agricultural production and productivity results in Liberia importing 50-60% of its staple food requirements, making the country vulnerable to global food price volatility.

The poor state of basic infrastructure and social service provision throughout Liberia continues to

constrain economic growth. Large scale urban migration is straining the capital Monrovia's limited infrastructure. Out of the 3.5 million total population 25% live in the capital. With the population expected to rise to 5 million by 2018, there is an urgent need for investment in roads, water, energy, transport and other infrastructure across the country. A large proportion of the rural population lacks access to even the most basic infrastructure and social services. Many areas are inaccessible because of poor road conditions.

Land issues and control over natural resources are recognized as one of the main sources of conflict in Liberia, threatening peace consolidation efforts and development activities, and resulting in poor land use and management. External security threats in the region can have a negative impact on internal security, leading to an influx of refugees, as with the post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, or violence spilling over into Liberia from neighboring countries.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) continues to maintain a strong presence nationwide. However, the UN plans to reduce its troops by more than half by 2015, to 3,750, bringing UNMIL to around 20% of its original size. Despite consolidated peace, the national security situation remains fragile and the process of rebuilding social and economic structures poses a significant challenge. High numbers of unemployed youth (especially men) remain a potential source of insecurity, particularly in Monrovia.

## Box 2: Objectives and methodology

The overall objective of the CFSNS is to provide information on food security, vulnerability to food insecurity and nutritional status in Liberia. This is captured by establishing the distribution of food insecure and vulnerable households and the various risks that households are exposed to as well as evaluating the causal relationships between factors that determine food and nutrition security.

The data is not comparable with that of the 2010 survey which was carried out during the lean season (May/August). Contrastingly, the current survey was conducted during the harvest period, a time of maximum food availability.

# URGENT NEED TO DIVERSIFY LIBERIAN DIET

Low food diversity and a lack of animal protein is a real concern for Liberia’s rural population, with Liberians highly rice dependent. While most Monrovians complement their daily rice with meat or fish and vegetables, those living outside the capital consume meat and fish far less regularly. Indeed, 45% of households in the rest of the country do not consume this protein-rich food group at all, whilst they rarely consume milk or fruits.

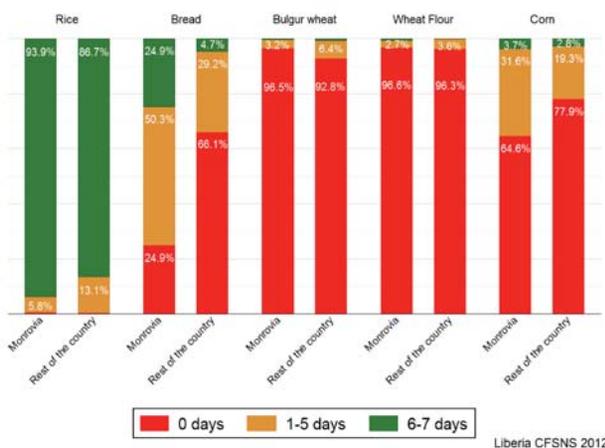
Nationally 27% of Liberians have low dietary diversity<sup>1</sup>, but this figure masks the wide gap between those in the capital and those outside (2.4% of Monrovians vs. 41% of others). At county level, in Bomi, Bong, Grand Kru, River Gee and Maryland the proportion with low diversity is close to half (49.6%), while in River Cess the prevalence is as high as 60%. A worrying 7% of households in Grand Kru, 6% in Maryland and 5% in River Cess consume a diet that consists only of staples and vegetables.

### Box 3: The food consumption score

The food consumption score (FCS) combines food diversity and food frequency (the number of days each food group is consumed) weighted by the relative nutritional importance of different food groups. Cereals, tubers and root crops are assigned a weighting of 2; pulses, 3; vegetables, relish and fruits, 1; meat, eggs, fish and dairy 4; sugar, oils, fats and butter, 0.5. It uses standardized thresholds that divide households into three groups: poor, borderline and acceptable food consumption.

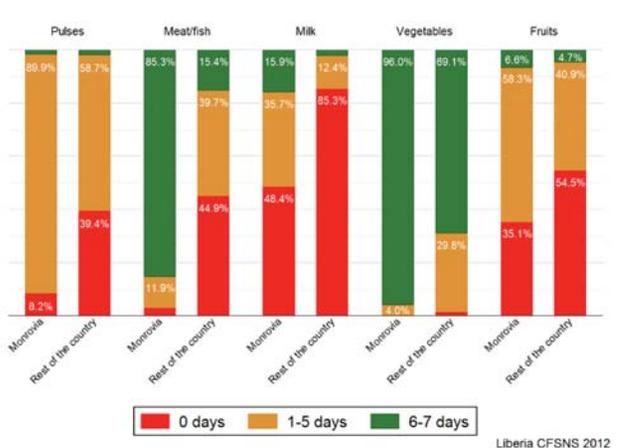
More than one in three Liberian households has unacceptable food consumption. Of these, 4% have poor consumption, which means they consume an extremely unbalanced diet that is likely calorie deficient and mainly consists of a daily staple (generally rice) flavored with some fish condiment. The 30% of households with borderline consumption supplement their daily staple consumption with vegetables and oils about six days a week. They eat small amounts of fish and meat regularly, but as condiments rather than as a source of protein.

**FIGURE 1: WEEKLY CEREALS CONSUMPTION: MONROVIA VS REST OF THE COUNTRY**



Those with acceptable consumption (65.5%) have a diverse and balanced diet consisting of a daily portion of staples and vegetables with meat and fish about five times a week. They are likely to consume some dairy and fruit as part of their diet on a regular basis.

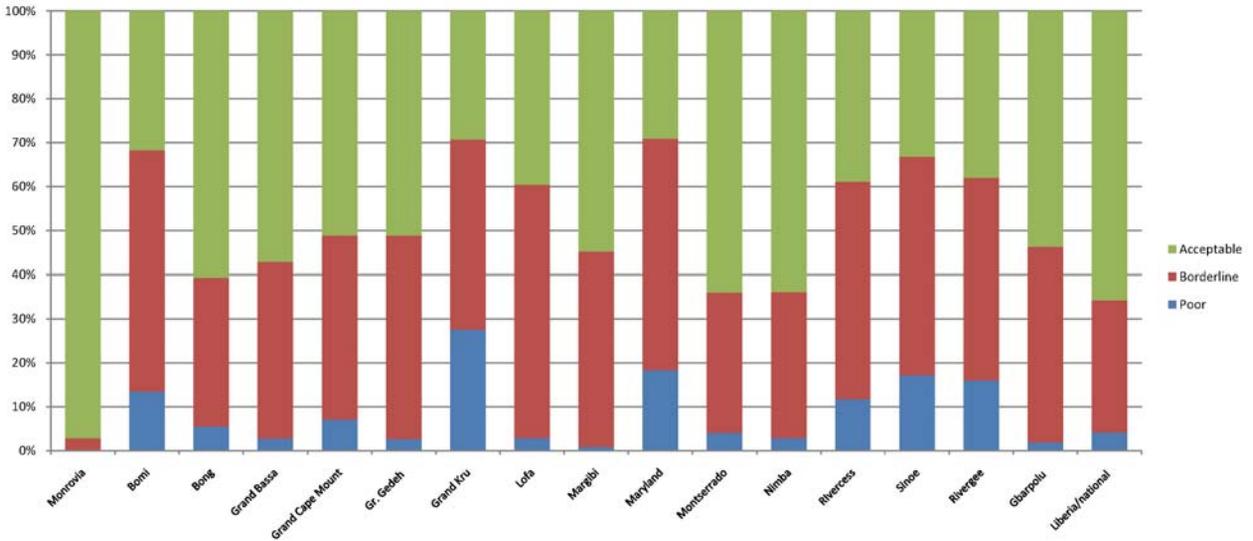
**FIGURE 2: PROTEIN AND VITAMIN RICH FOOD CONSUMPTION: MONROVIA VS REST OF THE COUNTRY**



Rural households are far more likely to have unacceptable food consumption than urban (55% vs. 19%). In Monrovia, which is home to about 25% of the population, almost all households are considered to have acceptable food consumption.

<sup>1</sup>Households that, over the course of a seven day recall period, consumed foods from four or fewer of the seven food groups are classified as having low dietary diversity.

**Figure 3: FOOD CONSUMPTION BY COUNTY**



## ONE IN FIVE HOUSEHOLDS ARE FOOD INSECURE

Households that spend a high proportion of their income on food are highly vulnerable to food insecurity because they have no buffer to protect them when prices rise. This is a particular issue in Liberia for two reasons: at a national level Liberia is highly dependent on food imports and is therefore vulnerable to global food price variations, and at the household level Liberians are highly reliant on purchasing rather than producing their own food.

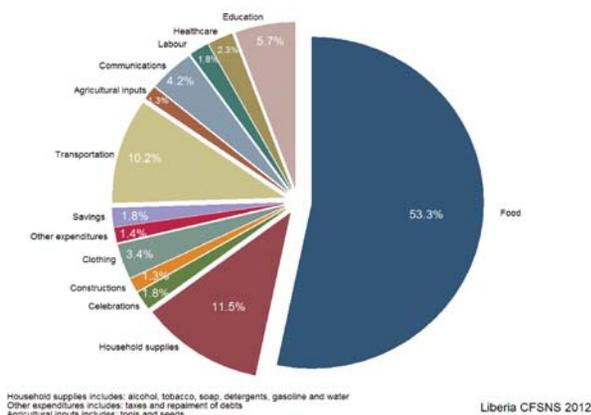
On average Liberians spend 53% of their income on food. The data indicates that 37% spend a very high share and 40% spend a high share on food. The chronic food insecurity situation in Liberia means that it is more revealing to measure food security through combining the food consumption score and the share of expenditure on food at the household level (see box 4).

### Box 4: Measuring food insecurity

The food insecure people are those that spend more than 60% of their resources on food and have poor or borderline food consumption combined with those that spend 40-60% of their resources on food and have poor food consumption. The moderately food insecure are the sum of those that have acceptable FCS but spend a very high share (>60%) of their income on food plus those that have borderline consumption and spend 40-60% of their income on food plus those with poor FC but a lower share of expenditure on food (<40%).

Around 18% of Liberian households are food insecure. Around 31% are moderately food insecure. This means only half of the Liberian population was considered food secure at the time of the survey (August – November).

**Figure 4: HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE**



**Figure 5: FOOD INSECURE FROM FC GROUPS AND FOOD SPEND**

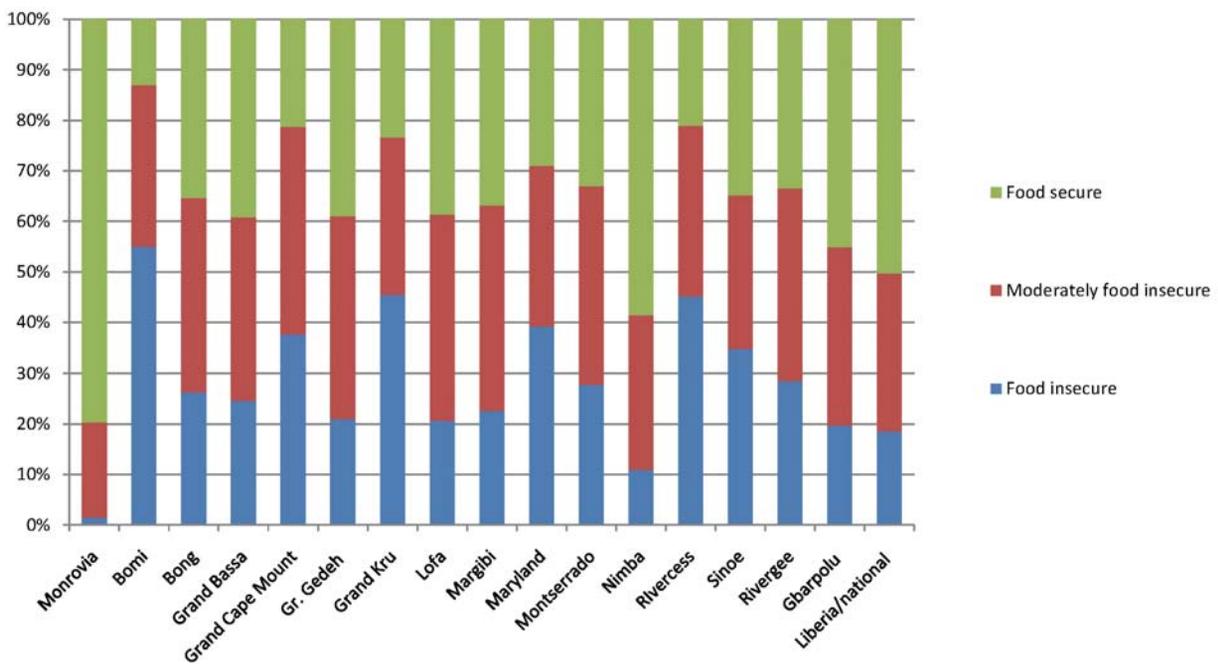
Food Consumption Groups	Share of food expenditure			Total
	>60% %	40-60% %	<40% %	
poor food consumption	2.40	1.19	0.56	4.15
borderline consumption	14.88	11.01	4.40	30.29
acceptable consumption	19.41	27.69	18.45	65.55
<b>Total</b>	<b>36.69</b>	<b>39.89</b>	<b>23.41</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Food insecure</b>	<b>18.47</b>			
<b>Moderate food insecure</b>	<b>30.98</b>			

Once again these national figures obscure a much more serious county level prevalence of food insecurity as figure 6 shows. The situation is most severe in Bomi, River Cess and Grand Kru where 55%, 45% and 46% of households are food insecure respectively.

Lofa and Margibi counties have the highest levels of moderate food insecurity at 41%, meaning that these households are highly vulnerable to becoming food insecure if there is a change in their situation or food prices rise.

Nationally almost half (48%) of Liberians said they had experienced a shock in the last seven days that had hindered their ability to access food. These shocks were most commonly reported as sickness of a household member (26%), high food prices (17%), loss of employment or reduced income (10%), death of a household member (8.4%), animal pests (5.3%) destroying crops and limited access to markets by road (4.7%).

Figure 6: FOOD INSECURITY BY COUNTY



## FOOD AVAILABILITY AND PRICE HIKES – ARE SEASONAL

Liberia has one long rainy season (May-October) followed by six months of dry season. North western (NW) Liberia harvests rice in November/December and south eastern (SE) in September/October, so the SE's lean season tends to start earlier, extending for five months from April to August. The NW has a slightly shorter lean season from June-September. While cassava can be harvested throughout the year, the main harvest takes place during July and August. Most subsistence farmers sell their surplus immediately after harvest to settle accumulated debts. Not only are they unlikely to have safe

storage facilities, but they also may not want to retain a surplus for fear of being unable to access the market to sell it during the lean season when the rains are heavy and the roads impassable. Ironically, it is during the lean season when vulnerable households become increasingly market reliant, at a time when prices are driven higher by increased consumer demand. Seasonality also has an effect on market prices. For example, in Lofa County, which is self-sufficient in rice, rice prices were particularly high during the lean season and fell in December following the harvest.

## FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE ARE GENERALLY POOR RURAL HOUSEHOLDS WITH INFORMAL LIVELIHOODS

Food insecurity and poverty are highly correlated, as figure 7 shows. A third (34%) of the poorest households (i.e. those in the lowest two wealth quintiles) is food insecure and a further 37% are highly vulnerable to food insecurity.

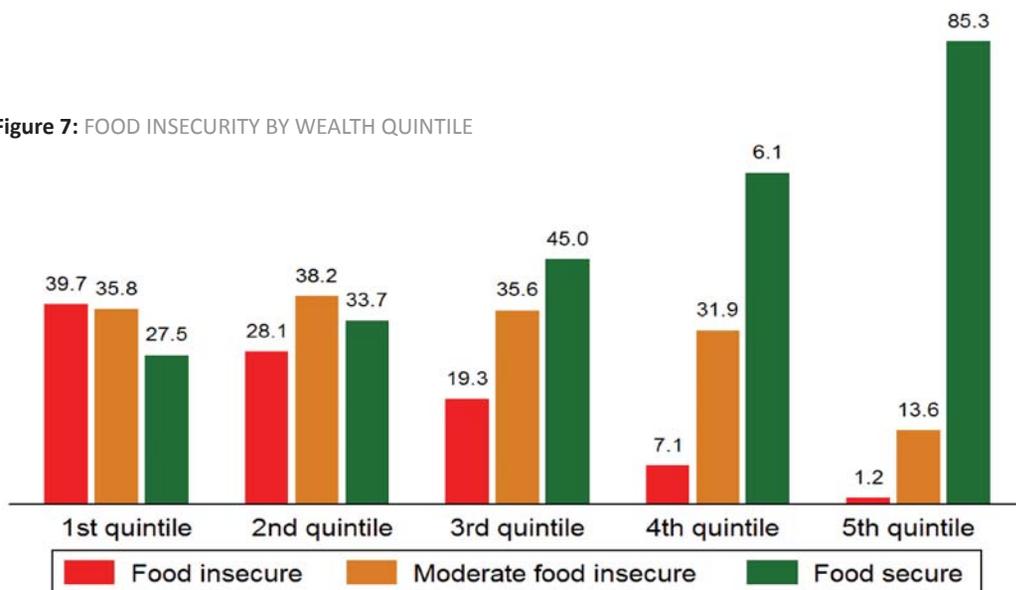
Households headed by women, the elderly and/or by widows/widowers are more likely to have unacceptable food consumption, particularly if they live outside Monrovia. Again this is related to reduced earning power and income because they lack the skills, time, energy or opportunities to work.

Across the country, groups of people sharing the same basic means of livelihood and main subsistence and income activities tend to face the same risks of food and nutrition insecurity. The survey reveals the extent to which Liberians,

particularly in rural areas, are reliant upon informal, precarious livelihoods. Less than one in 10 rural households are reliant on a regular salary as their primary source of income compared with a third (35%) in urban areas. Most rural dwellers (79%) derive their income from two or more livelihood sources, often combining food and cash crop production, petty trading or street vending, hunting/gathering, casual labor, palm oil, charcoal production or rubber tapping in order to diversify their sources of income.

Households deriving their income from charcoal production, mining, casual labor, food crop production, palm oil production, petty trade and rubber tapping are the most food insecure in the country based on comparing the differential between food expenditure and food consumption scores.

Figure 7: FOOD INSECURITY BY WEALTH QUINTILE



Liberia CFSNS 2012

# FOOD INSECURITY IS SPREADING FROM SOUTH EAST TOWARDS MORE CENTRAL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY

<p><b>BOMI</b> 55% FOOD INSECURE 32% VULNERABLE</p>	<p>The most food insecure county in Liberia is Bomi: on average households in that county spend 69% of their income on food, the highest in the country. 11% of households had experienced a shock in the last seven days, coping by going entire days without eating (vs. 2% national average). 40% said their major difficulty was high food prices in the last six months. A fifth of households consume just one meal a day. A high percentage of households are female headed (32% vs. 25% national average) and headed by widows/widowers (14% vs. 9%). Education levels are lower than average – just 62% have attended school vs. 70% nationally. The share of households with a chronically ill or disabled member is double the national average at 12%. Sanitation levels are deplorable with 91% of households having no access to a toilet compared with 65% nationally. Land access is very tenuous – 83% have no deeds for their plot compared with 66% nationally. Some 31% of households are involved in charcoal production, one of the livelihood groups that support the most food insecure people.</p>
<p><b>RIVERCESS</b> 45% FOOD INSECURE 34% VULNERABLE</p>	<p>Some 80% of rural households in River Cess are in the lowest wealth quintile. Households on average spend a very high proportion of their income on food (65%). A shocking 80% of households do not have access to safe drinking water and 96% have no toilet facilities. Road access is the worst in the country. A quarter of households have to walk between two and five hours to reach a motorable road. Health facilities are also the least accessible with 39% having to walk more than two hours to reach one. Education rates are extremely low: just over half have attended school (54% vs. 70% national average) and primary and junior high school net enrolment rates are way below the national average. Four fifths (80%) of households have no access to credit compared with 51% nationally. River Cess has the highest percentage of households involved in palm oil production (36%).</p>
<p><b>GRAND KRU</b> 46% FOOD INSECURE 31% VULNERABLE</p>	<p>Poverty is deeply engrained in Gran Kru County, with some 80% of households in the two lowest wealth quintiles. Junior high school net enrolment is very low especially for boys at just 1.4% vs. a national average of 15%. Grand Kru is remote and poorly connected. One in four households reported having no access to a health facility and one in five has to walk between two and five hours to reach a motorable road. Sanitation is appalling – 90% have no toilet. A much higher than average proportion is dependent on unpredictable or low earning livelihoods namely, food and cash crop production, hunting/gathering and mining. Households were struck by a much higher than average proportion of difficulties in the six months before the survey – namely high food prices, heavy rains/floods, crop failure, animal pests attacking crops and limited access to market by roads.</p>
<p><b>GRAND CAPE MOUNT</b> 38% FOOD INSECURE 41% VULNERABLE</p>	<p>This county has the highest percentage of households dependent on mining – one in four rural households relies on this work. Just 7% have improved sanitation. School enrolment rates for primary, junior high and senior high are all well below the national average. Households spend a very high share of their income on food (65%). They cite limited access to markets by road as a main difficulty in the last six months.</p>

# CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY REMAINS 'SERIOUS'

Stunting is a strong indicator of chronic food insecurity. At a national prevalence of 35.57%, the consequences of stunting are grave and important to understand (see box 5).

Liberia has managed to reduce its chronic malnutrition rates among under fives from 'critical' levels to 'serious' according to WHO classifications of severity of malnutrition. According to this survey, 36% of under fives are stunted compared with 42% in 2010. The

prevalence is higher (45%) in the 18-29 month age group, which is most likely linked to diet diversity and number of meals provided from six months onwards.

However, as the map below shows, six of Liberia's 15 counties still have critical levels (30-39%) of chronic malnutrition, peaking at 49% in Grand Gedeh, 46% in Grand Bassa and 45% in Nimba. While some counties have managed to reduce their rates significantly (particularly Margibi where stunting has dropped from 57% to 33%) rates have risen in five of the worst affected counties - Nimba, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Rural Montserrado.

In all counties except Grand Bassa (boys 45.02% vs. girls 47.68%) and Montserrado (boys 43.17% vs. girls 46.77%), stunting prevalence is higher amongst boys than girls (nationally boys 38.56% vs. girls 32.45%), peaking at around 50% in Nimba and River Gee counties versus around 40% for girls. The difference is particularly marked in the 18-29 month old age bracket in which nationally more than half of boys are stunted vs 39% of girls of that age.

### Box 5: Stunting

Stunting causes irreversible brain damage during the critical first thousand days of life, delays normal growth among children, increases the risk of death due to ordinary childhood illnesses and increases the risk of chronic diseases later in life. Malnutrition perpetuates poverty with its adverse effects on survival, productivity and education. This makes malnutrition one of the most important public health problems in Liberia. However, stunting is preventable. Children become stunted very early in life, normally before they turn two years old. Therefore, there is a small window of opportunity for timely preventive measures between conception and a child's second birthday.

Liberia: Chronic Malnutrition



Source: LISGIS, WFP

Production data: September 2012  
Datum: WGS84 - Grid: Lat/Long 1 Degree interval

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

WFP World Food Programme  
Comprehensive Food Security & Nutrition Survey (CFSNS 2012)

Chronic Malnutrition

- < 35 %
- 35 - 40 %
- > 40 %

0 35 70 140 Kilometers

# FACTORS THAT MAY EXPLAIN HIGH STUNTING RATES IN SIX COUNTIES WITH ‘CRITICAL’ LEVELS

<p><b>GRAND GEDEH</b></p> <p>49%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 21%)</p>	<p>One in five households is food insecure. Only a third (33%) of newborns is breastfed within one hour of birth compared with a 50% national average. Just one in five of 6-23 month olds are receiving the minimum dietary diversity compared with 28% nationally. Hygiene is also a serious issue: 92% of households do not have a toilet compared with 65% nationally.</p>
<p><b>GRAND BASSA</b></p> <p>46%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 21%)</p>	<p>Childhood illness rates are above average (53% vs. 47% average). 26% had diarrhea in the last two weeks before the survey vs. 17% average. Childhood measles vaccinations are low at 63% vs. 85% nationally and deworming is low at 59% vs. 68%. Breastfeeding practices clearly differ to that of other areas, with infants introduced to solid/semi-solid food earlier. Indeed, just 2.7% of babies under six months are breastfed compared with 48% nationally. Education levels are lower than in other counties. Only 56% have attended school versus 70% nationally and the primary net enrolment rate is half of the national rate at 20%. Improved water and sanitation levels are low at 47% and 17.5%.</p>
<p><b>NIMBA</b></p> <p>46%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 16%)</p>	<p>Despite being the most food secure county outside of Monrovia, stunting levels are critical and higher than two years ago. They are even higher for boys (51%) than girls (40%). Illness rates among children are higher than average and de-worming is low at 58% vs. national average of 68%. Regarding the main difficulties faced in the last six months, some 41% of households pointed to sickness of a household member. The county has the highest percentage of women with low body mass index (BMI) and their babies are highly likely to have low birth weight. Breastfeeding and feeding practices differ for boys and girls: just 5% of 6-23 month boys receive the minimum dietary diversity compared with 8% of girls against a national average of 28%. This is in contrast to a national trend of introducing boys to solid food earlier than girls. Less than a third of children of this age are given the minimum meal frequency.</p>
<p><b>RIVER GEE</b></p> <p>45%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 17%)</p>	<p>29% of households are food insecure versus 19% nationally. Rural poverty is entrenched with 60% of households in the lowest wealth quintile. Education levels are also low. Half of all under five year old boys are stunted compared with 41% of girls. This may relate to different cultural practices regarding breastfeeding: just 15% of 6-23 month old boys receive the minimum dietary diversity compared with 22% of girls. Boys are less likely to be introduced to solid or semi-solid food at 6-8 months.</p>
<p><b>RURAL MONTSERRADO</b></p> <p>45%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 17%)</p>	<p>When asked to name the main difficulties faced in the six months before the survey a third highlighted sickness of a household member. Diarrhoea rates for children are high at 25% vs an average of 17%. De worming is lower than average while the proportion of children given vitamin A injections is the lowest in Liberia at 69%. Just 7% of 6-23 month olds receive the minimum dietary diversity.</p>
<p><b>GRAND CAPE MOUNT</b></p> <p>42%</p> <p>(SEVERE: 18%)</p>	<p>Food insecurity is severe— just 21% of households are food secure. Childhood illness rates are very high, with 13% of households having no accessible health facility while half have to walk more than an hour to reach one. High diarrhoea prevalence is perhaps the result of unsafe drinking water: 8% of households mentioned this as a ‘main difficulty’ faced in the last six months. Sanitation is very poor - 7% have access to toilet facilities. As for child feeding practices, just 22% of babies are breastfed within one hour of birth, the lowest rate in the country. Only 4% of boys and 12% of girls receive the minimum dietary diversity at 6-23 months. Interestingly the county has the highest levels of obese and overweight women, indicating the double burden of malnutrition where chronic malnutrition in early years are a precursor of being overweight later in life due to an irregular metabolism.</p>

# WHAT IS EXPOSING LIBERIANS TO FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION?

## ISSUE 1: Widespread poverty and insecure livelihoods, particularly in rural areas

Poverty is often the root cause of food insecurity because poor households lack the resources required to access enough nutritious food to live a healthy and active life. Poor households are unable to invest in the inputs required to boost their own yields. Vulnerable farmers often have to sell any surplus they produce soon after harvest to earn income and repay debts. This exposes them to fluctuating market prices as well as not being able to benefit from selling when prices rise. The extreme poor have no financial buffer to protect them from shocks such as accident or illness of a household member or poor harvests/crop failure.

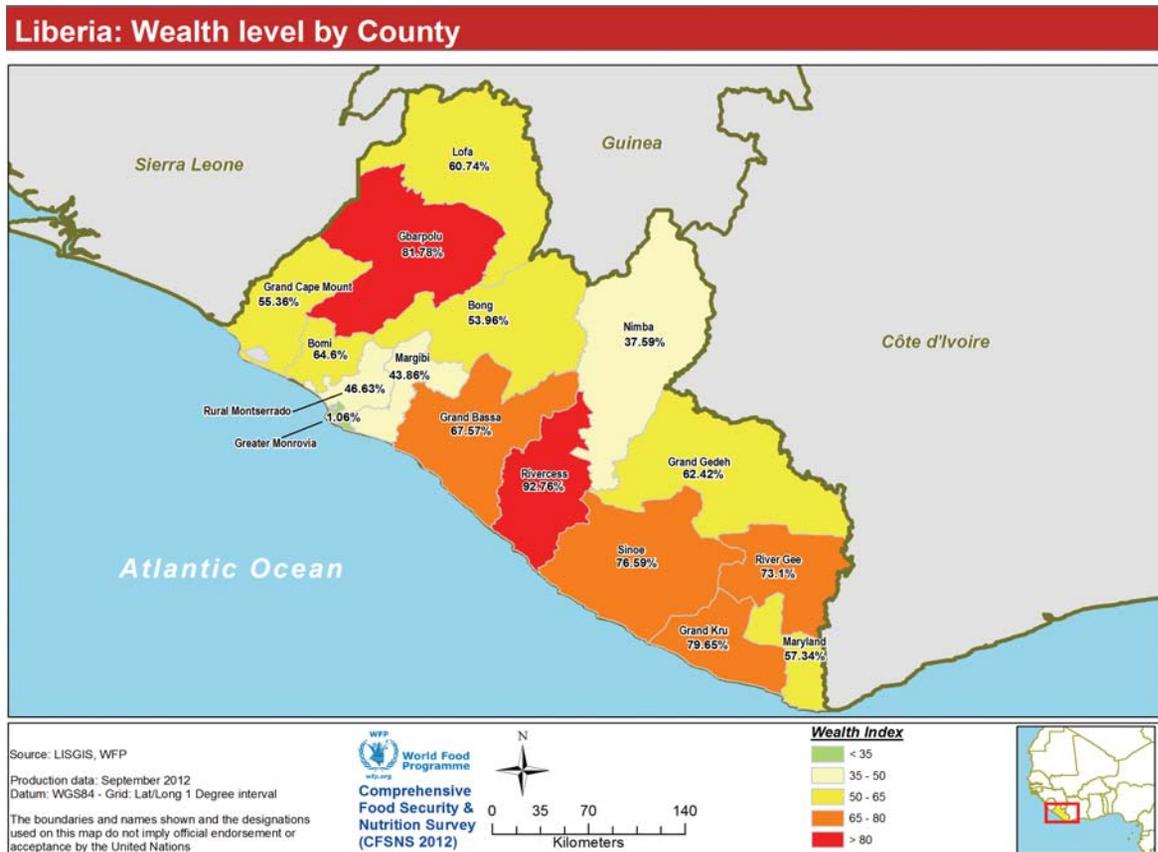
With more than four fifths (84%) of the population living below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day (UNDP 2011), most simply cannot afford to buy sufficient or varied food.

The increasing disparity in wealth between

### Box 6: The wealth index

In the CFSNS 2012 a wealth index (WI) was used as a proxy measure of wealth. WI is not an absolute measure of relative poverty, but a composite score based on asset ownership, access to water, type of sanitation and building materials. It helps to distinguish poor from rich households. It divides households into five categories, each representing 20% of households. Households ranked in the lowest/first category are the poorest while those in the highest/fifth are the richest.

urban and rural Liberia could create instability and social upheaval. Overall 15% of urban households are in the poorest two wealth quintiles compared with 74% of rural. SE counties are poorer than other areas indicating an urgent need for investment. Certain precarious and informal livelihoods, such as mining, and other agriculture related work (food crop production, rubber tapping, palm oil production and charcoal production) are associated with poverty and food insecurity.



## ISSUE 2: Failure to fulfil food production potential

Although agricultural production has increased in recent years yields are still well below the regional average and the post-harvest loss rate very high. Most farmers operate at subsistence level on small family plots growing rice, cassava, pepper, bitter balls, greens, aubergines, okra, pulses and corn.

In Liberia's hot and humid conditions, rice production should be thriving. However, as a result of the civil crisis, production fell by 76% between 1987 and 2005. Currently Liberia barely produces a third of the rice it needs to feed its population, relying on expensive imports to cover the rest. This leaves Liberians exceedingly vulnerable to high food prices and fluctuations in global markets.

Cassava production is still not given due consideration in terms of policy or investment. A national cassava policy to increase production and diversify cassava by-products into commercial sectors is required. It is equally important to invest in marketing the by-products of cassava. Fortification of cassava flour with micro nutrients and soya proteins can help address chronic hunger and stunting.

Cash crop production has grown dramatically since 2006 with the percentage of households producing them doubling from 28% in 2006 to 46% in 2009 and 55% in 2012. However, untapped potential for further growth remains.

Although the country has an estimated 2 million hectares of pastureland, the livestock sector accounts for only 14% of agricultural GDP. Liberia depends on imports of livestock products to satisfy domestic demand, with the survey showing that only 43% of households own any livestock. Although the coastline and extensive continental shelf have abundant fish resources, fishing is mainly a subsistence activity. The sector lacks equipment and storage/preservation facilities and technical know-how regarding aqua-culture hence only a small percentage of households derive their main livelihood source from this activity.

If Liberia is to reduce the high dependency on food imports, it must address the many constraints that are afflicting the agricultural sector. The use of fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides is negligible at less than 1%. Improved seed varieties are also

quite rare at around one in 11 households. Asked to list what was hampering their crop production the most, farmers pointed to attacks by pests and animals, followed by lack of tools, lack of seeds and lack of fertilizer/pesticides.

A fifth of households also cited a lack of labour as a constraint to increasing food production, resultant of thousands of Liberians leaving their farms for the city as refugees during the war who have not since returned. 14% of respondents blamed lacking access to land as a constraint, a factor particularly prominent for households in Margibi, Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Maryland counties. Less than 20% of total land in Liberia is privately owned, while a high percentage of the population either occupies state or private lands with little or no statutory or formal legal arrangements.

More than half of rural households have no access to credit from any source (banks, relatives, susu clubs<sup>2</sup>, etc) meaning these crop producers are unable to invest in the inputs required to increase their yields. Expansion of the microcredit sector may service to stimulate expansions in production and trade in rural areas, whilst increasing formal sources of credit may also achieve the same impact.

## ISSUE 3: Poor roads mean poor market integration and high prices in remote areas

Liberia's road network fell into a state of almost complete disrepair during the conflict and is yet to recover. This makes access to remote areas extremely difficult during the rainy season. As a result, market integration between rural and urban areas remains weak. Expensive markets and those with more volatile prices tend to be those that have poor road transport links and are therefore poorly integrated with the rest of the country. The SE region (River Gee, Maryland and Grand Kru) has the poorest road network and tends to be the most food insecure. Some 16% of households complained that their major difficulty in the six months before the survey was high food prices – though the percentage was as high as 49% in Montserrado and 40% in Bomi counties. On average 5% cited limited access to markets by roads rising to 12% or above in Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Margibi, River Gee and Lofa counties as their main constraint in terms of market access.

<sup>2</sup>Informal credit and saving club organized between individuals, widely prevalent in the country.

**ISSUE 4: Low education levels**

A large majority of Liberia's young population missed out on attaining basic education during the conflict. They therefore have neither the requisite education, nor the technical and entrepreneurial skills to obtain gainful employment in either the private or public sectors. Unemployment of youth, including a significant number of ex-combatants, remains a major threat to peace and stability in Liberia.

There is an established link between a lack of education and poverty, poor health, malnutrition and food insecurity. Education is key to supporting overall food security. Higher education can provide a greater opportunity to increase incomes, support enhanced health status, hygiene practices and basic nutrition awareness that all have a bearing on the consequent nutritional status of individuals. Those with no education or just with primary education are more likely to have unacceptable food consumption than those with higher levels of education. Overall 30% of Liberians have never attended school (24% of men and 36% of women).

**ISSUE 5: Rapid increase in urban and peri urban population**

Migration to the capital is continuing at a fast pace due to widespread poverty, income disparities, and a lack of access to health and educational facilities, food and employment opportunities in rural areas. It is steadily stripping the countryside of the farming entrepreneurs and workers that it desperately needs to increase agricultural production and strengthen national food security.

More than a fifth of rural households (22%) have at least one member that has migrated – 41% in Grand Bassa, 32% in Grand Gedeh, 31% in Lofa, 44% in Sinoe counties. This growing migration puts increased stress on urban infrastructure including housing, water supply, electricity and transportation, raising unemployment rates in urban areas. Furthermore, only half of remittances are transferred in cash, indicating that migrants are finding it difficult to earn sufficient money to save and send money back to their families.

**ISSUE 6: Poor sanitation and lack of improved drinking water**

Poor sanitation and a lack of safe drinking water contribute toward a higher prevalence of disease which in turn is an underlying cause of malnutrition as a result of the body's inability to effectively absorb nutrients from food. Just 13% of rural households have access to improved sanitation compared with 52% in urban areas, whilst just over half of rural households enjoy improved water sources compared with 77% of urban. In some areas a lack of improved water sources results in sanitation being even worse.

In River Cess for example (the second most food insecure county) only 20% of households have access to improved water sources and a deplorable 4% improved to improved sanitation. In terms of access to toilets, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Grand Kru counties all fair badly, with more than 90% having no option but to defecate in the bush. These are the most food insecure counties in Liberia.

**ISSUE 7: Ill health of children/ mothers and inadequate feeding practices**

Insufficient or inappropriate caring and hygiene practices, poor Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, use of unsafe water, inadequacy or absence of sanitation systems and inadequate access to maternal and child health services can all lead to ill-health. This in turn affects a person's ability to absorb the required nutrients from available foods, leading to malnutrition. In turn, malnourished people are more likely to get sick and have a lower resistance to disease. As stated above, poor food consumption and food insecurity are not the sole drivers of malnutrition.

Illness of a household member was the main difficulty that households mentioned having experienced in the six month run-up to the survey. On average 26% of households said they had been affected by this constraint, rising to 43% in Bomi, 41% in Nimba and 34% in Bong and Montserrado counties respectively. Early breast feeding is initiated by only half of mothers while the exclusive breast feeding rate is very low at 47%. Minimum diet diversity is extremely low at 28% for children of 6-23 months with female children consuming a less diverse diet than male. Minimum meal frequency is low at 35% for children of 6-23 months.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## MIGRATION AND EDUCATION – MoE, MoA, FAO, WFP, UNDP and INGOs

- The Government of Liberia urgently needs to update its investment plan in key sectors in rural areas to reduce migration by 25% over the next two years. A major achievement would be to connect county capitals with the national capital with asphalt roads. Future assessments should analyse the migrant population to design appropriate responses so that these levels of migration can be reduced.
- WFP operations / One UN projects to focus on youth empowerment activities, with a particular focus on improving their access to livelihood opportunities e.g. food for assets programme and other social safety net programmes.
- Ministry of Labour along with other ministries to provide legal framework for livelihoods such as petty trade where most jobs are created and enable the informal sector to be part of overall development.
- Ministry of Education (higher education specially) to focus on specialized county level technical institutions improving the access of youth to semi-skilled jobs.
- Education sector should develop partnerships in mechanical and heavy industry training with key academic institutions in the region or in emerging countries.
- All international companies investing in oil, mining, logging industry sectors, etc should finance at least 10% of the final year students studying specialized technical subjects at regional or international universities. This should be strictly limited to university students and not to government employees, ex-employees or contractors.
- Literacy classes for all farmer organizations in the food basket counties of Lofa, Nimba and Bong.
- Take home rations to be provided as incentives for all female students in junior and senior high school in the most food insecure counties with the highest gender disparities in enrolment to improve the status of Liberia's next generation of women.
- Literacy programmes for urban migrated youth and women in food basket counties where women are more disadvantaged.

## AGRICULTURE – MoA, MoE, MoLM, FAO, WFP and INGOs

- Prioritize the most food insecure counties with integrated programmes.
- Prioritize agriculture over mining in counties with high food insecurity. Certain counties to be declared non-mining/ protected zones and provided with support to increase agricultural activities and output.
- Self sufficiency for rice and cassava to be fixed at county level because of the slow pace of road network development and low market integration.
- Introduce different types of pulses for household consumption and commercialization in areas with highly fertile soil.
- Supply agricultural inputs (tools, seeds and fertilizers) to households with primary and secondary school graduates in all counties.
- Provide rice producing farmers' organisations with mechanical tools (tractors, parboiling, milling machines etc) in food basket counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba.
- Ensure land tenure rights for all farmers engaged in agriculture sector.
- Encourage crop diversification by supplying vegetable seeds to households with primary and secondary school graduates
- Reduce pre and post harvest losses by providing the right equipment and training to households with small scale rice production in Lofa, Nimba, Bong and River Gee counties.
- Increase locally suitable fish ponds/aquaculture to households dependent on fishing as main livelihood in Grand Bassa, Grand Kru, Rivercess, Sinoe, Margibi and Bomi counties.
- Establish markets for cash crops for households with 25-50 % of their resources coming from cash crops in Lofa, Nimba, Bong, River Gee, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties.
- Encourage livestock and poultry rearing for households with higher chronic malnutrition.

- Implement nationwide campaigns on community based approach to child feeding practices addressing chronic malnutrition.
- Promote health and nutrition of school age children in all schools in the counties with the highest level of food insecurity and malnutrition rates.
- Develop national nutrition programme to address chronic malnutrition during the first 1000 days “window of opportunity”.
- Improve access to health facilities with appropriate safety net programmes for mothers and lactating women and increase number of trained health personnel per county.
- Initiate country-wide breast feeding campaigns.
- Promote de-worming of pre-school children in counties with high stunting levels.
- School feeding for primary school children in the most food insecure counties.
- Fortify rice and cassava via farmers’ organisations under P4P in Lofa, Nimba, Bong , River Gee, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties.

- Review and update the food and nutrition strategy document with an action plan for 2013-2015.
- Implement a regular food security monitoring system as replacement for CFSVA.



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For more information please contact:

**Nitesh Patel**

[nitesh.patel@wfp.org](mailto:nitesh.patel@wfp.org)



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