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## **Where will the next food crisis strike and how to face it? Extended geographical monitoring and a common classification will facilitate the response**

**The European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the American Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) are working to innovate and reinforce their food security monitoring systems and to develop more efficient early warning tools. These efforts come as a response to the 2007-2008 global food crisis that increased significantly the number of countries under threat of famine. Satellite observation is the key instrument that will allow to double in 2010 the number of countries monitored in real time for detecting first indications of adverse agricultural outcomes. The new Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) system facilitates and accelerates the reaction time to food security crises by allowing a common and internationally recognised classification of their severity.**

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, more than 1 billion people go to bed each night with an empty stomach. In addition, the latest global food crisis resulted in more countries being added to the list of food insecure populations. This is probably the most urgent and dramatic problem that mankind faces today. Food security is not only a crucial issue for developing countries and their more vulnerable inhabitants; it is also key to building a more stable, equal, wealthier and safer world.

Special programmes are run and significant funds are mobilised every year by the international community in an effort to combat the increasing number of food insecure populations. Identifying the times and places where aid is required is crucial to deliver targeted and effective responses. Here is where the scientific community comes into play by developing methodologies and tools to provide timely information and objective assessments of the food requirements, thus supporting the decision-making process with solid evidence.

### **The power of satellite imagery**

Several organisations dealing with food security both in Europe and in the United States traditionally rely on satellite observations to support their assessment activities. As a consequence of the alarming spike in global food prices in 2008, many more countries are potentially threatened by food insecurity and need to be constantly monitored in order to detect early signs of adverse agricultural conditions. Satellite-based forecasting systems will therefore take on increased importance in the next years, allowing organisations to monitor a larger number of countries than it is currently possible to do with in-country offices.

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) will extend this year the real time monitoring system it has developed to forecast food crises. It will cover not only the Horn of Africa, but all the most food insecure countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. As the earth observation and agroclimatic data regularly received by the JRC are global, other countries outside Africa can also be monitored in case of food security crises.

This JRC operational system for regional crop monitoring and forecasting is based on satellite data and innovative agro-climatic models. More than 40 regional bulletins provide each year quantitative and qualitative yield forecasts for food insecure countries around the world, with a particular emphasis in Africa. In 2009, JRC provided for instance an early warning of the drought affecting Kenya, and correctly predicted a 15% below average maize yield one month before harvest.

In the United States, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) will extend this year its food security monitoring system from the current 20 to 50 additional countries around the world. The US Geological Survey (USGS), the National and Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) are establishing expedited procedures for processing of satellite data and model runs to support FEWSNET in this task.

### **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC): bringing scientific results closer to the decision making process**

When it comes to taking decisions on committing aid resources, policy makers need to have clear and reliable information integrating all dimensions of food security (climate data, economic analysis, nutritional and health data) and a common language on the basis of which all stakeholders can agree on the analysis of the food security situation and possible response options.

The new Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), built on a large consensus and accepted internationally, makes it possible, avoiding at the same time contradictory results deriving from the use of different scales. Facilitating therefore the donors' response.

This common classification has been recently developed by seven organisations (JRC, FAO, FEWS NET, Care International, Oxfam GB, Save the children and World Food Programme) dealing with food security information management. It is a standardised scale that integrates the following parameters: food security, nutrition and livelihood information, leading to clear statements about the nature and severity of a crisis.

It covers the full spectrum of possible situations - from 'food-secure' to humanitarian crisis - and takes into account the multiple dimensions of food security, i.e. availability, access/livelihood and nutrition. It provides as well a comprehensive framework of concepts, indicators, scales or benchmarks and a common, internationally accepted language. This facilitates the technical consensus on diagnostic among experts and allows sending clearer and coherent messages to decision-makers. Appropriate reporting and mapping tools provide synthetic views on the severity, extension and nature of the food security concerns and their likely evolution in the near future.

In December 2009, the European Commission decided to allocate € 1 276 269 (more than 1.7 million US dollars) over a period of 14 months to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Together with the JRC, FEWS NET and the other organisations involved in the development of the classification, the FAO will implement the second phase of the IPC initiative in at least 8 focus countries (6 of which located in Sub Saharan Africa) through improved technical development, field support and institutionalisation.

### Further information

- Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC): <http://www.ipcinfo.org/>
- EU's FOODSEC action: <http://mars.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mars/About-us/FOODSEC>
- Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET): <http://www.fews.net/Pages/default.aspx> / <http://earlywarning.usgs.gov> / <http://www.cpc.noaa.gov/products/fews/>
- FAO: <http://www.foodsec.org>

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**Fig 1: Somalia's Integrated Food Security Phase classification map**

