

# FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT Myanmar



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## Myanmar Food Security Situation

With **more than half of the population depending on agriculture**, the sector plays a central role in the country's poverty reduction strategies. However, agriculture, which employs more than 60% of the population and contributes 30% of the GDP, has been growing slower in recent years, behind the services and industry sectors. This has impacted heavily on the poverty situation in Myanmar, where **25% of the population continues to live below the poverty line**. Majority of the country's poor live in rural areas, with the highest poverty incidence in the two major agricultural regions of Delta and Dry Zones.

**Food availability** continues to be a challenge. Myanmar's **agriculture sector suffers from low productivity rates** and has some of the lowest yields in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is also markedly rice dependent, rice being a domestic staple and a major export commodity. The country's integration into the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)<sup>1</sup> and ASEAN opens up opportunities for it to undertake higher-value agriculture activities and plant higher value crops, which could increase incomes for farmers and rural households. Local planting practices, such as the heavy concentration of paddy farming in only two months—November and December—also prove to be counter-productive and limit the food production potential of Myanmar.







Modern farming techniques and irrigation facilities needed

## PILLARS OF FOOD SECURITY

Food security is "[when] people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern."

*Source: Food and Agriculture Organization*

 <p><b>AVAILABILITY</b></p> <p>sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis</p>	<p><b>UTILIZATION</b></p>  <p>appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation</p>
 <p><b>ACCESS</b></p> <p>having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for nutritious diet</p>	<p><b>STABILITY</b></p>  <p>access to adequate food at all times with no risk losing access as a consequence of sudden or cyclical events</p>

Still, **food access** seems to be the more problematic food security aspect in Myanmar. The country has the **highest price volatility in terms of rice**. With **60% of poor household incomes allocated to food**, these price spikes affect the ability of households to purchase food and could lead to nutritional shortages, especially among children. The **lack of infrastructure** also hinders consumers from accessing their daily food requirements; and limits the market access of sellers. Political instability and the increase in the number of displaced people exacerbate this access problem. As more of the **displaced populations are pushed back into the isolated borders** of Myanmar, their access to nutritious food diminishes.

In terms of **food utilization**, difficulty in accessing food due to increasing domestic food prices, and weak infrastructure systems result in the undernourishment of children and women. Those displaced by political in-fighting in Myanmar also face limited access to nutritious food. Myanmar has one of the highest percentages of children under 5 who are stunted, and of children under 5 who are underweight in the region. **Environmental hazards are also very real threats** to the country's agriculture sector. Myanmar's forests are heavily logged and the country is susceptible to natural hazards such as drought and flooding. These render the **stability of agricultural products vulnerable to shocks and external events**.

## INDICATORS

### Availability

- Number of undernourished people: 8.9 (2012-2014)
- Average value of food production: \$326 (2013)

### Access

- Prevalence of food inadequacy: 26.8% (2014)
- Road density (per 100 sqm of land area): 5.6 (2011)

### Utilization

- Percentage of children under 5 years of age who are stunted: 35.1% (2009)
- Percentage of children under 5 years of age who are underweight 22.6% (2009)

### Stability

- Value of food imports over total merchandise exports: 8 (2009-2011)
- Percentage of arable land equipped for irrigation: 21.3 (2010-2012)

<sup>1</sup> Composed of Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam

## Responses to Food Security Situation

The Government of the Union of Myanmar has long recognized food security as an essential element of its **agricultural policy. The agricultural sector itself has focused on two main areas: the commercialization of agriculture and maintaining food security.** A national plan of action for food and nutrition was set in place. These strategic frameworks have given rise to various programs that help increase agricultural productivity and improve household food security.

Most donor-led initiatives focus on interventions that address the **needs of the vulnerable in society, resilience to climate change, rural and microfinance, market access, value chain and supply chain management.** The WFP Program on Supporting Transition by Reducing Food Insecurity and Undernourishment Among the Most Vulnerable is the largest funded single project at US\$200 million.

A collaborative approach in development funding is also being pursued through the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), a multi-donor fund managed by the UNOPS, and established to improve the lives and prospects of poor and vulnerable people in rural Myanmar. Current government donors include Australia, Denmark, the European Union, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. From the private sector, Mitsubishi Corporation is a donor. The United States, through USAID, contributes to this consortium by leveraging the work of international research institutes to improve agricultural productivity and reduce hunger and poverty in Myanmar. USAID also contributes to capacity building of Burmese universities and research institutions to conduct research in agriculture, nutrition and food policy through linkages with U.S. universities and the private sector.

Another collaborative initiative joins Myanmar with Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Viet Nam, and the United States to work on food security and other important issues. The Lower Mekong Initiative supports these countries to discuss and work on critical issues for the region. In addition, the United States has expressed support for Myanmar's efforts of integrating gender, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and environmental, health, and nutrition issues in food security activities.

## Gaps in Food Security and Interventions Required

In terms of **food availability, increasing productivity in the agriculture sector must be a priority,** even as the country slowly shifts its focus to industry and services. Productivity can be increased through the **adoption of appropriate technologies and resource management systems. Infrastructure is necessary** for farmers to access markets and farm inputs. Roads are vital for food to be marketed. **Storage facilities** are as important in decreasing post-harvest losses as they are to increasing food availability.

## NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR FOOD AND NUTRITION (2011-2015)

"ensuring adequate access to, and utilization of food that is safe, adequate, and well-balanced on a long term basis in order to enhance the physical and mental development of the people of Myanmar"

Instead of focusing on low-value crops and single crops such as rice, efforts must be made to **allow farmers to produce higher value crops and transition to higher-value activities such as agribusiness.** Support for agribusiness in terms of hard infrastructure that facilitate trade and soft infrastructure that increase skills and ease trade border controls will help farmers successfully transition to the higher-value products and activities. **Rural and microfinance initiatives** could also help increase household incomes while supporting the agri-business initiatives of farmers.

The lack of **access to food** continues to be a problem for Myanmar, given the price volatility of food products, especially rice. Extending planting seasons beyond the normal two months, and the use of **modern farming techniques and irrigation facilities** will help produce a steadier supply of food and rice, which will in turn contribute to the stabilization of food prices and increase food access especially by the poor. **Expanding the road network** will also be beneficial as access to both sellers and consumers will increase.



Women vulnerable to food insecurity

**Stability** is also needed as Myanmar faces environmental challenges and climate change. The country's forests are heavily logged and some have been denuded; natural resources such as water are becoming scarce. These threaten the sustainability of farms and agricultural products. In addition to on-the-ground interventions to protect the vulnerable from these shocks, **policies that protect the environment and advocate for the more sustainable use of natural resources** are needed to ensure sustainability and stability in food production and access. Concurrently, **targeted programs** aimed at **helping the vulnerable segments** of the population such as women, children and ethnic minorities so they can catch up and meet nutritional and food requirements especially during food crises can be developed.

## SAMPLE FOOD SECURITY PROJECTS

- Water management improvement in the Central Dry Zone where irrigation facilities were established
- Terrace farming for better water management and increased yields in hilly areas of Chin and Shan States
- Technology dissemination to improve production, storage, and distribution of food
- Rural financing institutions developed to help kick-start household incomes
- Food security status monitoring for vulnerable segments during emergencies and calamities
- Nutrition projects for children
- Health education programs

## AGRICULTURE SECTOR STATISTICS

