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Rapid Food Security Assessment Report

In Laas Caanood Conflict-Affected Areas, The Sool Region

April 2023

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSNAU	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit
HFA	Humanitarian Food Assistance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KII	Key Informant Interview
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

Introduction and methodology

WFP Somalia, jointly with the WFP area offices and partners, conducted a rapid assessment in the Sool region of Somalia to capture the current food security situation of the conflict affected population. The assessment focused on the current status of food security dimensions (food availability, access, consumption), and level of emergency life-saving needs in the areas affected by the conflict (areas with population concentrations or internal displacement).

This rapid assessment was designed following three main qualitative data collection methods namely, desktop review of existing literature, key informant discussions and focus group discussions. This was to ensure the triangulation of findings using multiple methods. Field assessment teams conducted 54 key informant interviews and 24 focus group discussions in 8 districts in the affected zone with special attention on the food security needs of the affected population. The reason for following a qualitative survey method was that a quantitative household survey would have taken more time. Further, such a household survey could have been constrained by physical access to affected populations.

Key findings

- **Markets and access to markets:** WFP monitored seven marketplaces (Laas Caanood, Xudun, Taleex, Buuhoodle, Ceerigaabo, Qardho, and Garoowe) in the assessed areas. Although overall functionality of these markets was good, some shops were being closed in parts of Laas Caanood town due to the impact of the conflict. The livestock market in the region was generally accessible. However, with already declined herd sizes, according to pastoral assessment (FSNAU, December 2022), the severe drought had further reduced the market value of animals, thus affecting the purchasing power of pastoralists. Different food options were available across markets, with rice and pasta being the most common cereals available. Prices remained relatively stable until March 2023, and then slight variations reported, especially in Laas Caanood, cereal prices exhibited some volatility, indicating the unpredictable situation in the area.
- **Direct impact on livelihoods and livelihood assets:** A significant proportion (65%) of households reported that they lost their assets due to the conflict, particularly the livestock, which is the rural communities' primary source of income. About 35% of households reported losing their access to land or grazing areas to feed livestock. Salaried employees and small-scale business owners also experienced challenges in accessing their businesses or work.
- **Food consumption and current coping capacities:** The assessment findings outlined that household affordability had decreased due to the loss of assets and reduced income levels. The livelihood coping mechanisms of affected households included irreversible emergency and crisis coping mechanisms such as migration to other areas, selling assets such as livestock and dwellings at a loss, and exhaustion of savings or borrowing money.
- **Affected population and needs:** The assessment estimated that approximately 100,500 affected individuals were food insecure, accounting for approximately 8% of the total population in the eight (8) assessed districts. These food-insecure people need immediate lifesaving assistance. Moreover, needs for other essential items such as shelter, health, and WASH was also reported.

1. Introduction

The Sool region is located in the Northern Inland Pastoral livelihood zone (06), with the exception of some parts of Laas Caanood district, where it is classified under the Hawd Pastoral livelihood zone (05). The two livelihood zones are characterized by a semi-arid climate, with limited and unpredictable rainfall. The primary livelihood activity in both zones is livestock rearing, with main species being camels, sheep, and goats¹.

The region has been experiencing a severe drought for three years, and as a result, level of acute food insecurity remains very high². Droughts have led to a decline in livestock productivity and in severe cases, death of animals due to starvation or dehydration. Consequently, household food security situation has been affected significantly since most of households rely on livestock as their primary source of food and income.

Besides drought, the conflict between different clans is another driver of acute food insecurity in this area. These conflicts arise in most cases due to competition over limited natural resources, such as grazing areas and water sources³.

In Laas Caanood district of Sool region, recently escalated conflict has claimed many lives, displaced tens of thousands of people, and disrupted livelihoods. The vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) unit of the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a rapid food security assessment to understand the key food insecurity issues in the affected districts for effective decision-making.

The “affected food insecure population” refers to the individuals who got displaced, lost assets and livelihoods, and impacted by the destruction of infrastructure due to the conflict, those among the most vulnerable that require humanitarian assistance to urgently meet essential life-saving needs, including food, water, shelter, and healthcare.

1.1. Objectives

The overall objective of this rapid assessment was to assess the current food security situation for an informed, efficient, and effective integrated response. The specific objectives were to understand the current food consumption level of the affected population, to evaluate market functionality in the affected districts, to understand the critical impacts to the livelihoods, and to estimate the food

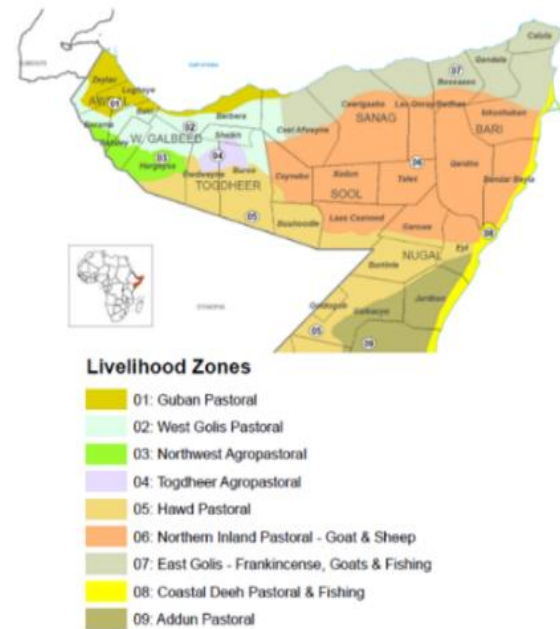


Figure 1: Livelihood Zones in affected regions (Source- FSNAU and FEWSNET, 2015)

¹ <https://fsnau.org/downloads/Somalia-Livelihood-Profiles-30-June-2016.pdf>

² <http://fsnau.org/downloads/Somalia-Multi-Partner-Technical-Release-on-Somalia-2022-Post-Deyr-Assessment-and-IPC-Analysis-Results-28-Feb-2023.pdf>

³ [Document - UNHCR Flash Report #26 - Clan conflict displaces 702 individuals in Taleh district, Sool region.](#)

insecure population who are in need of urgent lifesaving food assistance. In addition, the assessment also aimed to understand current coping strategies adopted by the most vulnerable households.

1.2. Coverage and timeline

The assessment was conducted in the conflict-affected areas in Sool region, specifically Laas Caanood, Taleex, and Xudun districts. Besides, the assessment also covered areas where communities were hosting the displaced people, including Buuhoodle, Caynabo, Ceerigaabo, Qardho and Garoowe.

The rapid assessment commenced on the 7th March, was conducted over a period of 10 days, and concluded on 17th March 2023.

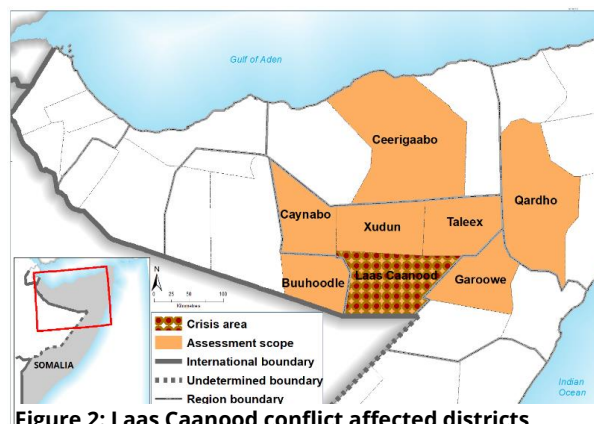


Figure 2: Laas Caanood conflict affected districts

1.3. Methodology

The rapid assessment was a qualitative exercise and included a desk review of existing secondary sources of information, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) representing the crisis affected area. The survey methodology was developed by following WFP corporate technical guidance⁴ for rapid food security assessments. The key informant discussions were held using field-tested key informant guides. Moreover, semi-structured group interviews with 6 to 8 participants were conducted using a guided FDG module led by a moderator who probed and encouraged active participation, disagreement, and feedback of the affected populations triangulating information collected through desk review and key informant interviews.

Desk review: The desk review gathered existing data and reports, such as the latest IPC, UNHCR displacement monitoring dashboard⁵, Interagency reports, OCHA flash reports, and other relevant sources. This stage aimed to gather information about the most recent affected population and food security situation in the affected areas to identify data gaps that needed to be addressed during the primary data collection stage of the rapid food security assessment.

Primary data collection: The primary data collection involved 54 key informant interviews and 24 focus group discussions in 24 villages within the four districts of Sool region (Laas Caanood, Xudun, Caynabo, and Taleex) and the four districts (Buuhoodle, Garoowe, Ceerigaabo, and Qardho) where the displaced populations were hosted. Purposive qualitative sampling methodology was used to select individuals as key informants based on their knowledge and experience of food security and the impact of the conflict in the area. Representation from local authorities, health workers, community leaders, farmers, traders, and humanitarian actors was considered. Participation of female respondents was also ensured.

⁴ [Technical guidance - WFP VAM.pdf](#)

⁵ <http://prmn-somalia.unhcr.org/yearly-displacement>

2. Assessment findings

2.1. Geographical areas and affected people

According to the assessment findings, approximately 100,500 people were reported as food insecure and directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, accounting for about 8% of the total population of the districts.

Garoowe and Buuhoodle districts reported the highest number of food insecure people, 26,134 and 18,913 respectively. Table 1 shows the estimated number of affected food insecure people by district.

Table 1: Conflict-affected estimated food insecure population per district

District	Estimated Food Insecure People	Total Population Estimate (2023)	Percent affected
Buuhoodle	18,913	88,269	21%
Ceerigaabo	8,813	160,748	5%
Caynabo	860	87,176	1%
Garoowe	26,134	300,540	9%
Xudun	13,540	86,873	16%
LaasCaanood	14,565	239,391	6%
Qardho	2,340	152,711	2%
Taleex	15,300	84,131	18%
Total	100,464	1,199,839	8%

2.2. Food availability

Based on WFP’s market monitoring exercise conducted in seven markets (Laas Caanood, Buuhoodle, Xudun, Taleex, Qardho, Garoowe, and Ceerigaabo), overall functionality of the markets was reported as good-to-fair and essential food items were available.

Markets: Overall, the livestock market in the region was generally accessible, and pastoralists were able to sell their animals in the markets. However, the severe drought had taken a toll on the body conditions of animals, causing emaciation thus reducing their market value. This hugely contributed to decline in purchasing power of pastoralists as seen from the decreasing Terms of Trade between Local Quality Goat and Imported Rice (Figure 4).

Most food items were available with rice and pasta being the most common cereals available to purchase. Prices remained relatively stable (Figure 3) until March 2023 when prices started spiking. In March 2023, the WFP VAM/Supply Chain joint market monitoring had detected low stocks of maize and wheat flour in the markets of Laas Caanood, Taleex, and Xudun, an indication of specific supply chain challenges in these markets.

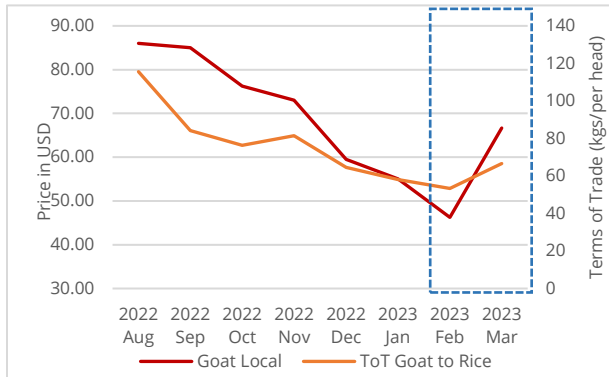


Figure 4: Average monthly local quality goat price and terms of trade trend in Laas Caanood

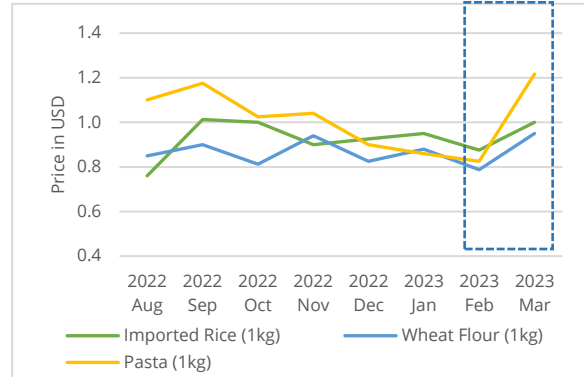


Figure 3: Average monthly prices of imported food items in Laas Caanood

Moreover, shops continued to be closed in parts of Laas Caanood town due to the impact of the ongoing conflict. However, given the higher dependency on neighboring cross-border trade for supplies, the trend of local cereal prices clearly implied the unpredictable situation in Laas Caanood district (Figure 5).

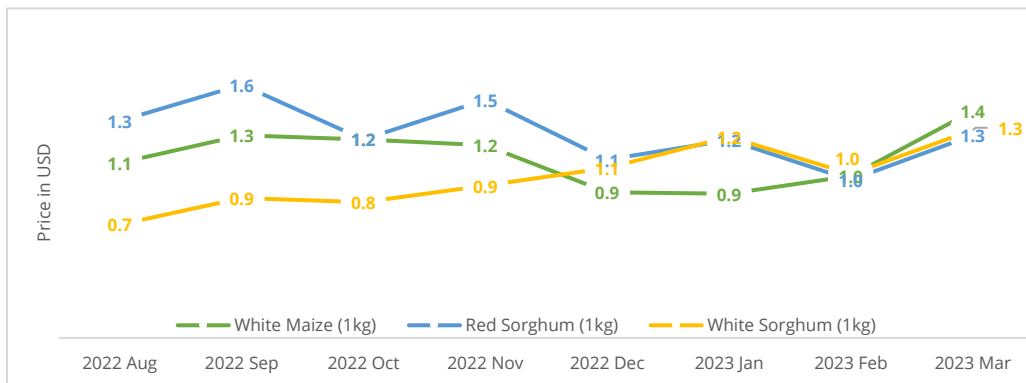


Figure 5: Average monthly local cereal price trend in Laas Caanood

2.3. Food access

The access to food was studied using household sources of food, availability of food stocks, access to income generation or livelihood opportunities and access to humanitarian assistance. As a result of the conflict, livestock herd sizes continued to decline and it has further exacerbated household food insecurity. Salaried income earners and small business holders were also facing challenges to access their business or employment.

Sources of food: The main sources of food for households were social support, burrowing from family and relatives, and humanitarian assistance provided by some partners. Social support systems remained overstretched, but still an important external source in ensuring food access for households affected by the conflict. However, approximately one-fifth of the people interviewed reported that lack of emergency food assistance is a serious concern. Food aid from the government or NGOs was least reported as the main source of food, indicating that the assistance coverage is not sufficient to reach overall vulnerable households.

Food stocks: According to the assessment findings, in the assessed districts, most households lost their food stock because of the conflict. Specifically, following the key informant and FDG findings, approximately nine out of ten households had experienced a loss of food stock (Table 2).

Table 2: Key Informant feedback on loss household food stocks

District	No	Unsure	Yes
Buuhoodle	6%	6%	88%
Ceerigaabo	13%	0%	88%
Caynabo	0%	0%	100%
Garoowe	0%	0%	100%
Laas Caanood	0%	0%	100%
Qardho	50%	0%	50%
Taleex	0%	0%	100%
Xudun	8%	8%	83%
Overall	7%	4%	89%

Livelihoods and income: The mostly reported income sources were sale of livestock and livestock products, casual labor, and petty trade. Salaried-income earners from both public and private institutions and small-scale business owners were also affected significantly.

In addition to the poor rainfall and persistent drought, conflict/insecurity have compounded livelihood erosion of many households thus widening their food consumption gaps. From the assessment findings, a significant proportion (65%) of households had lost their assets, particularly livestock. Worse still, some pastoral households who displaced to other areas were unable to access markets to sell their livestock due to conflict, particularly in Laas Caanood.

Moreover, 35% of households reported losing access to usual grazing lands either fully or partially, causing reduced pasture availability, deteriorated livestock body conditions lowering their market value, thus reducing households' income levels. Accordingly, most households experienced reduced affordability to food and were forced to migrate for means of survival.

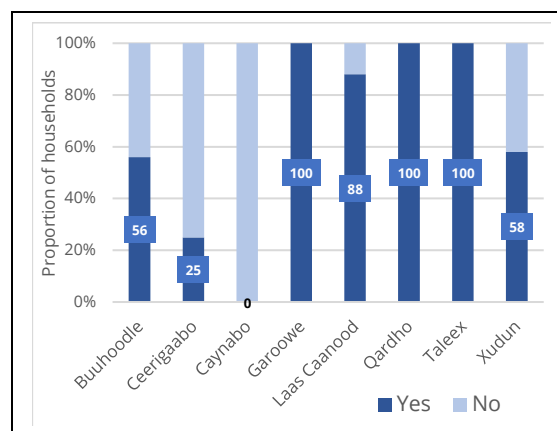


Figure 6: Loss of household assets

2.4. Food consumption

On top of the effects of prolonged drought, conflict also resulted massive displacements and a food shortage which affected households' food consumption levels. The primary staple items consumed by the assessed communities were rice, bread, and pasta. Most households resorted to coping up with two meals per day, but some households also reported that they consumed only one meal per day. Based on the discussions, only a few households were found to be managing to afford three meals per day.

Average water consumption in the assessed areas was reported as 22 liters per day per household. However, it also varied across districts, with some cities such as Laas Caanood had very low consumption of up to 9 liters per day (see figure 7). Besides, water price in Laas Caanood has been following an increasing trend since November, a confirmation of water availability problem in the conflict-affected districts, calling for urgent attention to supply water for drinking and other household needs particularly in the IDP locations.

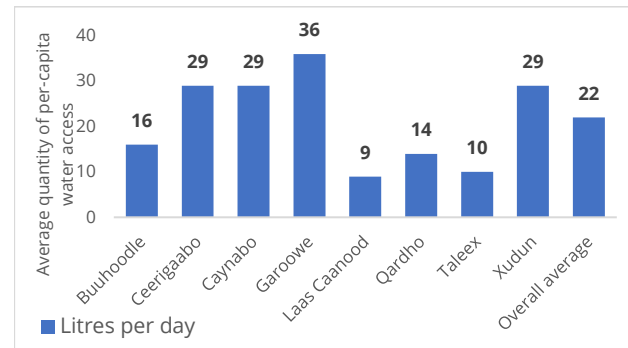


Figure 7: Access to water

2.5. Current food security coping mechanisms

Communities in the assessed areas reportedly turned to both food consumption-based and livelihood-based coping strategies to survive with the shortages of food and lessen the compounded effects of conflict and drought.

Food consumption-based coping: Majority of the affected people reported to be borrowing food and/or money from friends or family to buy food, eating reduced quantities, and skipping of meals for daily survival. Most households in the assessed communities also reported consuming lesser number of meals per day compared to before and relying on less preferred food with low nutritional value. In addition, the majority of households reported limiting adult intake for allowing children to eat. One of the participants during the focus group discussion in Boocame village of Laas Caanood district said: *“Food for adults is becoming scarce because parents would rather feed their children with the little food that they have instead of eating themselves.”*

Another typical food consumption-based coping strategy used by the public was making purchases on credit. About 75% of the households were using credit to buy food, which increased their debt levels and contributed to their financial struggles.

Livelihood-based coping strategies: The assessed communities had adopted several crisis and emergency livelihood coping strategies such as migration of entire households, selling assets, use of savings, and reducing the non-food expenses. Although some households reported to have sold assets such as livestock, homes, and Jewelry, the majority claimed to have had no time to gather and/or sell their assets because they were forced to relocate during the conflict.

Moreover, most households had withdrawn their children from schools due to conflict and significantly reduced their non-food expenses in education and health to prioritize buying food. One participant of focus group discussion in Holhol said: *“People had already started reducing the non-food expenses in education and health before the conflict due to drought, but now the situation has become worse.”*

As a result of the compounding effects of drought and conflict, many rural households experienced erosion of their livelihoods and exhaustion of their coping mechanisms, thereby widening their food consumption gaps.

2.6. Condition of IDPs

The condition of IDPs was assessed following four criteria, food security, water and sanitation facilities, health facilities, and impact on schools and school feeding. The overall living condition of IDPs was reported as poor. Majority of IDP households lacked adequate housing, sufficient access to nutritious food, safe drinking water, sanitation, access to health care, and sustainable sources of income.

Food security: The IDPs, who reported spending a disproportionately high proportion of their income ($\geq 65\%$) on food, continue to struggle to purchase nutritious food due to rising food prices. A food distribution programme that was established and overseen by members of the local administration and respected members of the community was previously reported in the districts of Laas Caanood and Buuhoodle. On the same note, in majority of the villages, communities were strongly suggesting to utilize local leaders and elders to coordinate and ensure equitable resource sharing.

One participant in the focus group discussion in Ceegaag village of Buuhoodle district said: *"We would prefer the food distribution process to be implemented and monitored by the interested village leaders."*

Water and sanitation: Majority of IDPs did not have access to clean drinking water. Moreover, the lack of availability and congestions in sanitary facilities greatly increased the risk of waterborne infections. IDPs reported to have formed a campaign to raise awareness of proper garbage disposal in order to prevent waterborne infections.

Health facilities: According to assessment findings, IDPs either lacked access to any healthcare facilities or had a very small number that were overrun with patients and understaffed. It was reported that other stakeholders had provided assistance to a few health facilities in Buuhoodle town. Households were more susceptible to ailments like high fever, water and air borne diseases, pneumonia, malaria, measles, and diabetes. Further, there was inadequate access to maternity care, childcare services, and vital medications.

Impact on schools and school feeding: Almost all schools in Laas Caanood and Xudun were closed due to conflict and displacement, except the schools with WFP school feeding programme. Some of the schools were being used as shelter by the IDPs.

Most of the WFP School Feeding Programme-affiliated schools were operational, but there was a notable increase in the number of students because of the conflict-related migration from the Laas Caanood district. There was a lack of educational resources such as classrooms, teachers, and infrastructure. Also, the increase in children overburdened the school feeding program, making it difficult meeting the school feeding programme objectives.

2.7. Perceptions on Humanitarian Food Assistance (HFA)

Nearly all of the focus group participants expressed gratitude for the food assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. However, they were concerned that the commodities wouldn't last for a month for large families as well as the rotation of assistance since the needs continued to rise. One participant from Ardaa, Ceerigaabo district said: *"The number of households who receive HFA must be increased because we host displaced people and drought is also impacting the source of income of the host community."*

The most common request from the participants was to support with cash-based transfers to meet their survival needs other than food such as WASH, health, and education. One participant from Dharkaynganyo, Laas Caanood said: *"We are very thankful to receive the support but would request non-food assistance through cash-based transfers."*

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

- The survey findings outlined that the food security among the conflict affected population has seriously deteriorated and urgent humanitarian lifesaving food and nutrition assistance is needed. Approximately, 100,500 individuals are currently food insecure due to the conflict.
- Further, access to minimum survival needs such as access to WASH, health and education services deemed to be poor particularly among the newly displaced and vulnerable minority populations.
- Overall, the functionality of markets was good although some of the shops were being closed in parts of Laas Caanood town due to the impact of the conflict. However, in some locations, increasing food prices and a lack of variety of items were evident.
- The food security situation of assessed IDPs was reported as dire, particularly food consumption, access to water, and sanitation were reported as extremely concerning. Further, most of the IDPs exhausted their current food security coping capacities.
- Some of the schools were being used as IDP centres. Additionally, an influx of students to the operational schools in the host community was evident that continued the challenges such as stretching and overburden of limited resources.

3.2. Recommendations

- Emergency humanitarian food assistance should be provided to the severely food insecure populations affected by the conflict to meet their survival food needs. Further, it is imperative to address essential needs such as access to shelter, health, and education.
- Urgent action should be taken to improve access to water and sanitation facilities in the conflict-affected areas, as access to safe water and sanitation can help prevent disease spread and improve overall health outcomes.
- Moderately vulnerable populations living in the affected areas should be supported with emergency livelihood and resilience-building initiatives such as asset creation, vocational training, or community-based enterprises. Such livelihood interventions will support reestablishing their livelihoods and becoming self-reliant within a short time frame.
- Given the influx of new admissions to the operational schools, the school feeding programmes in the functional schools should be scaled up.
- Monitoring coverage should be increased in the areas assisted by the humanitarian agencies to understand the gaps and issues of ongoing assistance and the support of trusted community leaders can be useful in reaching the most displaced vulnerable households.
- The situation in the affected regions was highly volatile, and a follow-up food security assessment or a multi-sector needs assessment should be conducted.

