

Regional needs expected to increase with 2015/16 El Niño

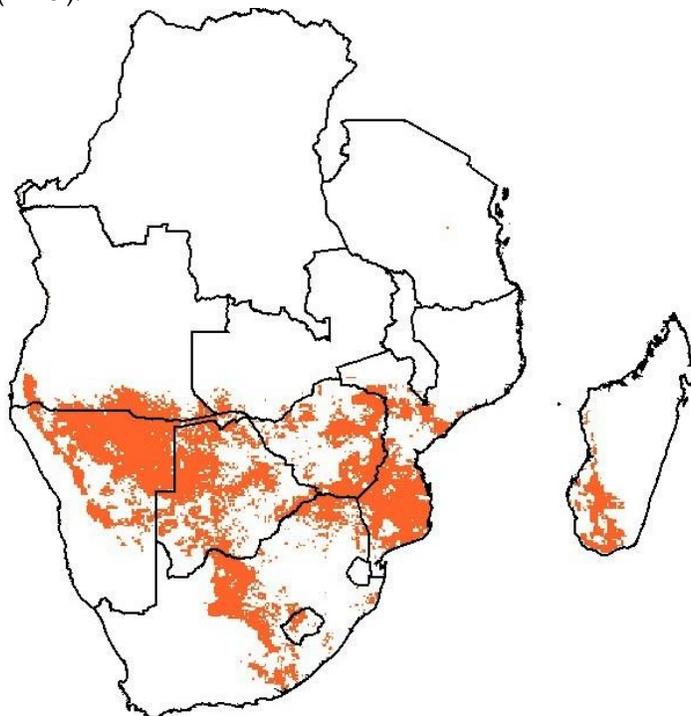
Though early, seasonal performance is off to a very poor start in South Africa, Angola, parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and central Madagascar due to suppressed precipitation and higher than normal temperatures associated with El Niño. Seasonal rains for most countries typically begin in November, but national and international forecasts indicate a high likelihood of erratic or a delayed start to rainfall during the October to December period. Acute food insecurity is already more severe than usual in the region due to below-average regional cereal supplies and above-average staple food prices. Currently, over 3 million people are in need of assistance across the region. Depending on the extent of prolonged dryness, reduced rainfall, and flooding between October 2015 and March 2016, food security outcomes in the region could deteriorate further. Close monitoring of seasonal progress is required and additional humanitarian assistance may be needed in areas where rainfall is poor for a second consecutive season.

The ongoing El Niño is forecast to continue until mid-2016. El Niño events in Southern Africa are typically associated with below-average rainfall in southern and central areas, while northern areas usually receive above-average rainfall. Analysis of five major El Niño events that occurred between 1981 and 2014 show that on average, abnormally erratic rainfall led to insufficient water for crop growth in areas in the central and southern parts of the region. In contrast, El Niño has historically enhanced the rainfall distribution that is ideal for crop production in northern parts of Tanzania.

During the 2014/15 production season, both drought and flooding contributed to poor crop growing conditions and led to regional maize production that was 10 to 15 percent below average. This could occur again during the current 2015/16 season. In October, very dry conditions and high temperatures have delayed early seasonal cropping activities in some areas. Suppressed rainfall in most parts of the region is expected to continue in the coming week, according to short-term forecasts. Satellite vegetation index analyses have begun to depict deteriorating ground conditions in Angola and the maize triangle region of South Africa, some of the same areas that experienced drought and low crop production during the 2014/15 season. Other areas with pre-existing dryness from the previous season and a high likelihood of below-average rainfall between October and December include southwestern Madagascar, northwestern Lesotho, southern and central Mozambique, and neighboring parts of southernmost Malawi, most of Zimbabwe, northeastern Botswana, northern Namibia, and southernmost Zambia (Figure 1). Last season's drought has already affected grazing and water availability for livestock, and there are reports of drought-related livestock deaths in South Africa, Namibia, and Swaziland.

Ordinarily, between October and December poor households in the region participate in land preparation and cultivation of their own plots while simultaneously seeking agriculture-related labor opportunities to earn income for food, seed, and input purchases. This consumption year, better-off households are hiring less labor after earning less revenue due to poor 2014/15

Figure 1. Areas that experienced poor 2014/15 crop performance and that also have enhanced chances of below-average crop performance during this year's 2015/16 El Niño event, based on the Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI).



Source: USGS

crop performance. Households that usually depend on crops and labor for their livelihoods between October and March are expected to face livelihood and food deficits during this period. These deficits will be exacerbated by the higher chances of a later seasonal onset and erratic rain patterns during an El Niño event. Delays in planting and harvests due to these shocks can result in an extension of the lean season. Coping strategies will include increased migratory labor and depletion of assets during the peak lean period between January and March.

Acute food insecurity is already more severe than usual in the region due to low regional cereal supplies and above-average staple food prices. Depending on the magnitude of dryness and flooding this season, regional cereal supplies could be limited and further deterioration of food security outcomes are possible. Food insecurity response plans for the October to March period in [Malawi](#) and [Zimbabwe](#) are currently underfunded. Close monitoring of seasonal progress is required and additional humanitarian assistance may be needed in areas where rainfall is poor for a second consecutive season.

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