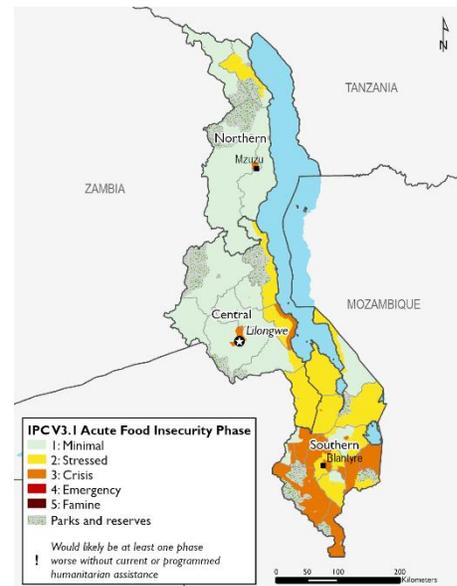


*Crop losses and high food prices result in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in southern and central Malawi*

**KEY MESSAGES**

- Although favorable harvests in much of northern and central Malawi resulted in an increase in national crop production this year compared to the five-year average, tropical storms and dry spells resulted in significant crop losses in much of southern Malawi and some central districts. In the worst-affected areas, many households in the very poor and poor wealth groups reported low to negligible cereal and cash crop harvests from the main harvest ending in August. The reduction not only directly affected food and income from crops and crop sales, but also significantly diminished agricultural labor income. At the same time, high inflation linked to weaker export revenues, high global food and fuel prices, and the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha in May are further constraining household access to food for both rural and urban populations. These shocks are expected to drive Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes throughout the October 2022 to May 2023 outlook period.
- FEWS NET conducted field assessments in several livelihood zones of concern in southern Malawi in September. In the worst-affected areas, such as Machinga district, FEWS NET observed that many poor households are subsisting on limited income from sales of natural resources and migratory labor by other family members that traveled to Mozambique, while consuming only one-to-two meals per day. In some cases, households are resorting to consuming foods such as maize husks. Based on outcome analysis using the Household Economy Approach and other available evidence, typical food and income sources are insufficient to prevent widening food consumption gaps among poor households as the November to March lean season progresses.
- To mitigate the potential for worsening acute food insecurity during the lean season, the government and humanitarian partners plan to deliver humanitarian food assistance beginning in November. Based on currently available plans, deliveries will likely cover household kilocalorie needs for three to five months, ending in April when the next harvest begins. In southern and central districts where planned levels of assistance are significant enough to prevent food consumption gaps, FEWS NET assesses Minimal! (IPC Phase 1!) and Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are most likely. However, in some districts, the level and timing of food assistance is unlikely to be sufficient relative to the scale of need and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes will likely persist.
- Based on global, regional, and local weather forecasts, Malawi will most likely receive below-normal rainfall in the northern half of the country and above-average rainfall in the southern half of the country. Episodic weather events such as mid-season dry spells and flooding in low-lying areas are possible. Southern Malawi's Middle Shire, Lower Shire, and Phalombe Lake Chilwa Plain livelihood zones commonly suffer from both dry spells and flooding, while lowland areas along the shores of lake Malawi and across the country typically experience flooding. While the 2022/23 harvest is expected to be average on the national level, these episodic weather events – coupled with reduced financial access to key agricultural inputs such as fertilizer – are expected to result in a third-consecutive below-average harvest in the south.

Current food security outcomes, October 2022



Source: FEWS NET

FEWS NET's classifications are IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

## NATIONAL OVERVIEW

### Current Situation

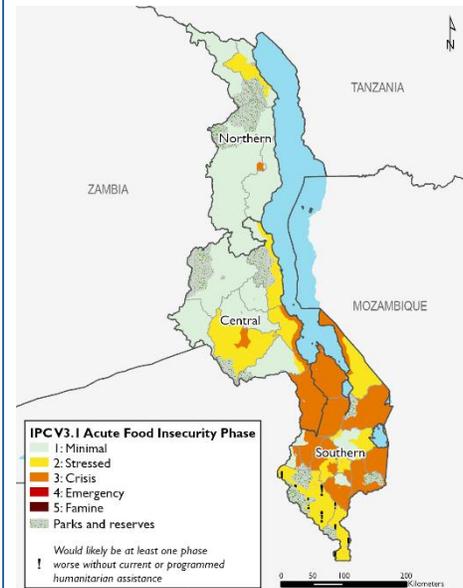
**Agricultural production:** The country continues to have adequate overall maize stocks held by farmers, private traders, and government agencies as it enters the typical lean period from October to March. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MOAFS) estimates, total maize stocks will be above the 2022/23 requirements for all national uses. Despite reduced production of maize compared to last year, Malawi's carryover supply from previous years affords it average supplies of staple stocks. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's third-round crop estimates, released in June 2022, show national maize production was lower than the previous production season but higher than the five-year average. The two government parastatals, National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) and Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), hold stocks designated for humanitarian assistance and subsidized commercial sales. As of July 2022, ADMARC and NFREA reported having 177,379 MT and 291,191 MT, respectively. The estimated demand for 2022/23 is about 3.5 million MT net stocks, including carryover stocks of 535,723 MT from last year. ADMARC markets that sell subsidized maize remained atypically closed for commodity trading due to an organizational restructuring but were set to open by early December.

About 16 percent of Malawi's maize production comes from irrigated farms as per the Ministry of Agriculture. The ministry estimates that irrigation production will decline by nearly half in central and northern districts due to high input costs and in southern Malawi due to back-to-back tropical storms. The storms caused siltation and left some farms under-water. Thus, farmers have lost assets and face limited access to seeds and fertilizers.

**Start of 2022 rainfall season and planting:** The weather forecast shows average to above-average rainfall, with timely start of rain supporting an average 2022/23 crop production. Producers will be affected by limited agricultural inputs and high fertilizer costs that could reduce the planted areas, lowering labor opportunities for poor households.

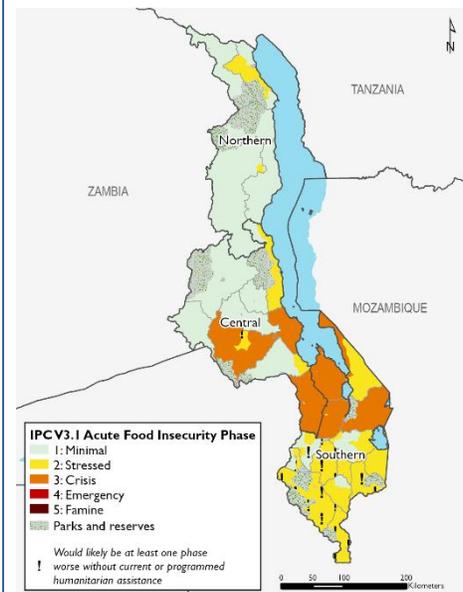
**Macroeconomic conditions:** Malawi continues to face economic instability. Below-normal foreign exchange revenues from tobacco sales without significant loans or grants from international partners are contributing to atypically high inflation that is pushing up the cost of living. Central Plateau is the main tobacco producer, but the crop is also harvested by small holder farmers across the country. Annual tobacco production, [Malawi investment and trade](#), in 2022 is 43 percent below the five-year average, and overall income earned were 25 percent below the five-year average Tobacco contributes [over 50 percent of the country's total foreign exchange earnings](#). The price drop in the international market has resulted in lower revenue, affecting the country's foreign currency reserve that is used to import necessities from abroad. Low foreign exchange availability pushes inflation further as Malawi depends on imports for most processed foods. The devaluation has caused imported items to be more expensive in local currency (MWK) terms. Low foreign exchange also affects the availability of fuel for transportation, domestic energy, and industrial power. As a result, inflation has risen steeply from 10 percent in October 2021 to 27 percent in October 2022 (Figure 1). Most households in Malawi earn 20-30 percent of their annual income from tobacco labor and sales, which are directly impacted by the ongoing tobacco price reduction. The poor are the most

Projected food security outcomes, October 2022 to January 2023



Source: FEWS NET

Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2023

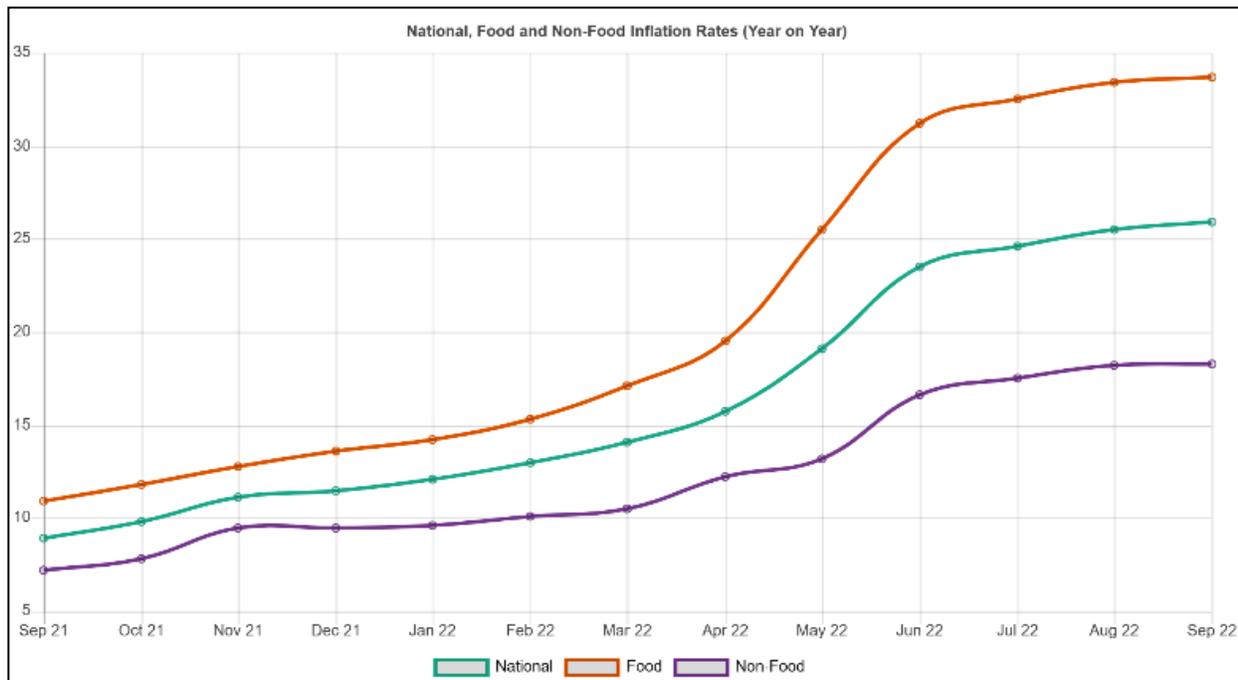


Source: FEWS NET

FEWS NET's classifications are IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

affected by reduced employment and wage rates.

**Figure 1.** Annual inflation in Malawi, September 2021-2022



Source: National Statistics Office

In addition, fuel shortages are causing intermittent power supplies, with a negative impact on business activity. Furthermore, the pace of inflation for food and non-food commodities is leading to a reduction in purchasing power and consumer demand. As a result, income from the sales of goods and services, as well as petty trade and self-employment, is below normal for many poor households. While both rural and urban households are affected, the impact on access to food is greater among the urban poor, who rely primarily on income from these activities to purchase their minimum food needs.

**Staple food prices:** Prices for maize and other alternative staple foods have continued to trend higher than last year and the five-year average in both rural and urban areas. Given concurrent declines in household income due to high inflation and lower employment opportunities, these trends have reduced household purchasing power and access to food. On average, in October 2022, maize prices trended 162 percent above last year and 132 percent above the five-year average. The main drivers for the higher prices include reduced crop production in the south, prolonged closure of ADMARC markets that sell subsidized food, high inflation, macroeconomic challenges, as well as above-average informal exports into neighboring countries. According to the Centre for Social Concern Urban Cost of Living Survey report, the urban basket of basic needs for August 2022 was 160 percent higher than in August 2021.

However, steep month-on-month increases are abating, with month-to-month trends showing some stability. In August and September, prices for food (maize, beans, rice) and non-food items were stable in 10 markets and increased by 9 to 12 percent in two other markets. Across the 12 monitored markets, prices ranged from 97 to 190 percent higher than last year and 66 percent to 174 percent higher than the five-year average. Maize prices ranged from 250 MWK to 382 MWK/kg compared to 108 to 168 MWK/kg in September 2021. The prices of beans decreased in two markets, were stable in six others, and increased by 6.9 to 15.0 percent in four markets compared to the previous month, but still ranged from 46 percent to 130 percent above the same time last year and 50 to 140 percent above the five-year average. Similarly, rice prices were stable in five markets and increased by 5 to 30 percent in the rest of the markets, but generally above last year and the five-year average.

**Livestock production:** According to the Ministry of Agriculture, livestock monitoring data collected in April 2022 show increases in livestock holdings across species in all regions and at the national level. Nationally, the number of goats is reported to have increased by 105 percent, pigs by 238 percent, and cattle by 164 percent versus the livelihoods baseline

years of 2012/13 and 2013/14. The key exception to this trend is in southern Malawi, where households in districts affected by tropical storms and rainstorms have registered localized reductions in livestock holdings due to the tropical storm-induced flooding in January and March 2022, when livestock deaths were reported. As a result, households’ income from livestock production has declined and income from labor sales has also declined among poor households.

**Nutrition:** The March 2022 Malawi Nutrition Bulletin reported a worsening of malnutrition indicators, especially in districts impacted by tropical storms and flooding. In the absence of a comprehensive nutrition SMART survey, the bulletin indicates that at the national level, there was a 30 percent increase in admissions of children with severe wasting in February 2022 (4,472) compared to February 2021 (3,442). More children were admitted for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) treatment in the districts of Chikwawa, Nsanje, Balaka, Chiradzulu, and Phalombe in March 2022 compared to the same period in 2021 which is in line with the districts severely impacted by Tropical Storms Ana and Gombe. SAM admissions increased most significantly, by 64 percent, in the Chikwawa district (from 526 in February 2021 to 867 in February 2022).

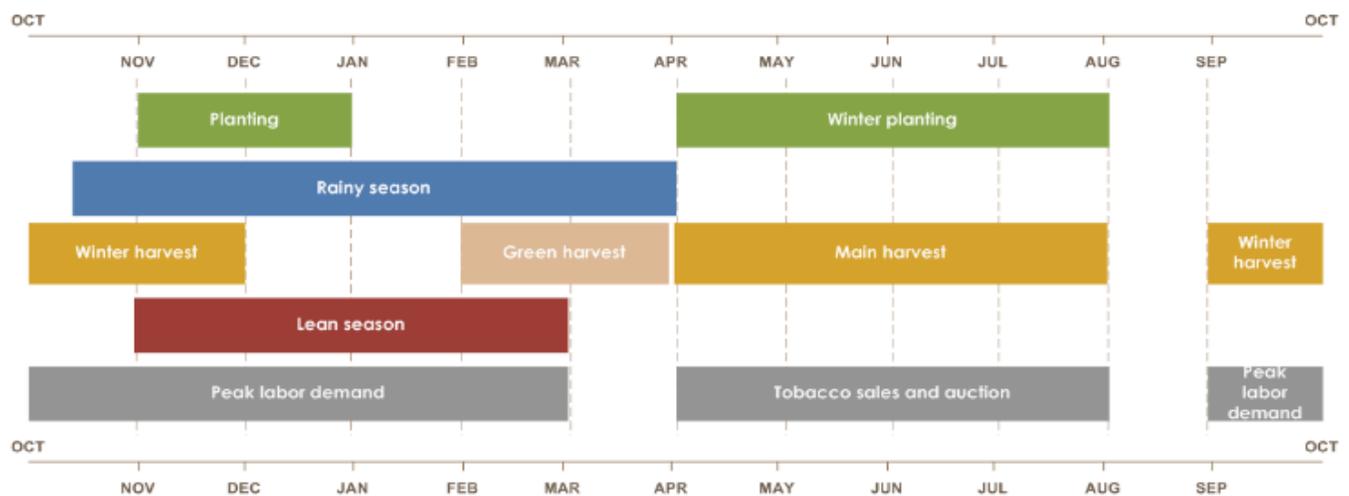
**Humanitarian food assistance:** Given the recent conclusion of the main harvest and ongoing winter harvest, humanitarian food assistance distributions are not currently ongoing.

*Current Food Security Outcomes*

Although the 2022 staple food harvest was near average on the national level and staple food prices are starting to stabilize, the impact of cyclones and flooding earlier this year reduced the production of food and cash crops in southern Malawi. Based on FEWS NET’s outcome analysis using the Household Economy Approach (HEA), very poor and poor households in the south experienced a 10-25 percent reduction in income from crop sales, with an additional reduction in petty trade and other self-employment income of up to 25 percent. High inflation and the devaluation of the MWK early this year has affected petty trade and self-employment opportunities, especially in the south. October represents the start of the traditional lean season in which most poor households, especially in deficit areas, deplete their own produced food and depend on market purchases for food. In rural areas, the poor production year caused many families to rely on market purchases for food earlier than in a typical year, without sufficient income to cover spiking food costs. Poor households face constrained financial access to food due to increased food and non-food prices and reduced household incomes, impacting household purchasing power. As a result, poor households in southern Malawi and some districts in central Malawi are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

Reductions in household purchasing power are also driving an increase in acute food insecurity among the urban poor. Households in the urban centers of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe, Mzuzu are likely Stressed (IPC Phase 2). However, the average national harvest has supported normal food availability, leading to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) outcomes in most of rural central and northern Malawi.

**SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR**



Source: FEWS NET

### Assumptions

The most likely scenario from October 2022 to May 2023 is based on the following national-level assumptions:

- **National food stocks** are expected to be sufficient through the 2022/23 consumption year. Malawi realized a gross production of 3.716 million MT and a net production (factoring in post-harvest losses) of about 3.300 million MT of maize. With total maize requirements at around 3.67 million MT, national food stocks are expected to be sufficient to cover demand. Net informal maize trading volumes estimated at around 50,000 MT outflows will not be significant enough to affect the national volumes. However, cereal stocks at the household level in sub-national areas experiencing reduced crop production are lower than usual, especially in southern Malawi.
- **Irrigated crop production** has been constrained by high input prices in northern and central Malawi and earlier flooding in Southern Malawi. The irrigated winter crop harvest will be below average, according to the Ministry of Agriculture.
- According to both local and global forecasts (FEWS NET science partners, SARCOF, and the Malawi Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCMS)), **the main rainfall season from October to March** will most likely vary from average to above average. OND (October-November-December) period rainfall will likely be below average to average in northern Malawi; however, rainfall is expected to be normal in central and southern regions. During the JMF (January-February-March) period, rainfall is expected to increase to above-average levels for most of Malawi. The DCCMS also predicts localized episodic weather events such as dry spells and flooding. For instance, the above-average rainfall through JMF poses a risk of flooding, particularly in parts of southern Malawi.
- Rainfall is expected to be sufficient to support an average national 2022/23 crop production season, but episodic weather events and reduced financial access to key agricultural inputs such as fertilizer are expected to result in a third-consecutive below-average harvest in the south. Reduced access to inputs will likely compromise production for very poor and poor households as the prices of fertilizers have tripled compared to last year. Limited availability of the input in the local market and doubled prices of subsidized fertilizer compared to last year are causing low application of inputs and lowering the crop production.
- **Income from agricultural labor** will likely be below average overall. From October to January, agricultural labor will center on land clearing, cultivation, planting, and weeding. An average crop production season is predicted, and labor demand is likely to be normal, though wages may be lower as more households are expected to seek out labor opportunities given the previous poor production season and elevated prices of food and agricultural inputs. As a result, wages are expected to decline in response to the increased supply of labor. Due to high input costs, the amount of cultivated land is likely to drop, reducing the labor required for farm activities. Agricultural labor, which provides over 30 percent of overall incomes, is especially significant as it is done mainly in the lean season and serves as one of the main income sources during that period of the consumption year.
- **Livestock production:** Income from livestock sales is expected to be above average for middle and better-off households, driven by above-average herd sizes and prices. However, such income for very poor and poor households will likely be below average as these households are likely to engage in distressed livestock sales to compensate for the reduction in crop sales income given the below-normal crop production year.
- **Incomes from non-agricultural labor, construction-related labor, and self-employment** will likely be below average owing to reduced incomes from the middle and better-off households who offer labor to very poor and poor households. Additionally, self-employment activities may have a dwindling customer base in the face of increases in households that use this activity for coping. Self-employment incomes are significant between peak agricultural labor periods, especially from July to October.
- **Labor migration** will likely increase as households, especially in southern Malawi, run out of produced food during harvest. This is a severe way of coping mainly used at the peak of the lean period. More households reported labor migration as early as June/July in the current consumption season.
- **Macroeconomic challenges** are expected to persist due to reduced foreign exchange revenues from below-normal tobacco production, high global food and fuel prices linked to the Russia-Ukraine war, and the recent 25 percent devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha. According to the Reserve Bank of Malawi's Statement of the 2022 Fourth Monetary Policy Committee meeting released in October, Malawi's actual domestic economic activity was estimated to grow by 1.7 percent in 2022, down from 4.2 percent in 2021. It will pick up slightly to 2.6 percent in 2023. The report attributes

the slowdown to decreased agricultural production in 2022, intermittent electricity, high commodity prices, fuel shortages, and overall high inflation constraining consumer demand. The statement further projects that the 2022 annual average inflation will rise to 21.5 percent from 9.3 percent registered in 2021 and increase to 22 percent in 2023.

- Despite the recent stabilization of staple crop prices, **maize grain and other staple food prices** are projected to trend above 2021/22 prices and the five-year average. Elevated food prices will continue to be driven by higher demand for food from southern Malawi districts, which registered production reductions and informal cross-border markets from Tanzania, due to higher prices and exchange gains by exporting to Tanzania and Mozambique. In addition, government's setting of higher minimum crop farmgate prices and higher retail prices of subsidized maize sold by ADMARC has led to maize prices remaining atypically high even after harvests.
- In rural and urban areas, **household purchasing power** will be below average compared to last year and the five-year. An average weekly wage in the urban center is 50,000 MWK, which would buy four to five 50kg bags of maize last season. Now, however, it will buy only two bags of maize. In rural areas, sale of a goat would buy about three 50kg bags of maize. Currently, the same amount would buy only one bag.
- The Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA) reported that funding for the lean season **humanitarian food assistance** response program has been secured by the government and its development partners. The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) 2022/23 food security assessment and IPC analysis informed food assistance plans. Food assistance in cash or in-kind food transfers will target households that the MVAM and IPC assessed to be facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of acute food insecurity; these households will receive a full food ration from November 2022 for a period ranging from three to five months. FEWS NET expects that the level of assistance is sufficient to prevent worse food insecurity outcomes in several targeted districts where over 25 percent of the base population will likely receive their full caloric requirements throughout the outlook period. However, households in some districts or parts of some districts – including Salima and Ntcheu districts in central Malawi and Mangochi, Machinga, Phalombe, Mulanje, Thyolo, Neno, Mwanza, and Chiradzulu districts in Southern Malawi – will not start to receive humanitarian assistance distributions until the January to March period.

### *Most Likely Food Security Outcomes*

Most poor and very poor households will depend increasingly on the market for basic food supplies as their food stocks dwindle between October and January. Increased market reliance will continue through March, just prior to the start of the 2022/2023 harvest in April. Because of the high price of food and non-food commodities, as well as dependence on the market and a lower-than-average agricultural income, household financial access to food is expected to remain below normal. Households in the middle wealth group and, to a lesser extent, the poor wealth group will be able to compensate for the reduced income from crop sales through the typical income that they earn from raising livestock. However, poor households will take a larger reduction in their income from labor, as the labor supply is expected to rise given the shortfalls in crop-related food and income sources and drive a consequent reduction in wages and/or days of labor available. In addition, high inflation will decrease household purchasing power, to the detriment of poor and very poor households that will rely on food purchases for at least six months of the year.

As a result, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are expected across much of southern Malawi and some parts of central and northern Malawi. In some districts, the start of humanitarian food assistance deliveries from November onward will play a significant role in prevent more severe acute food insecurity outcomes, particularly in the far south and parts of Lilongwe district, where Minimal! (IPC Phase 1!) and Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are likely. However, in areas where food assistance deliveries will either begin late or will not be sustained for the full five months, the outstanding factors such as poor purchasing power, depletion of food stocks, and reduced crop yields are still expected to result in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

Finally, the rising cost of living is expected to place additional pressure on access to food among urban households. While the income of urban households will be near-normal, deriving mainly from employment, trading, and services, they will face increasing difficulty affording both their essential food and non-food needs. An atypical increase in the number of Stressed (IPC Phase 2) households is expected in cities such as Lilongwe and Blantyre, with households shift to consuming less nutritious substitutes and reduce the number of meals eaten per day.

*Events that Might Change the Outlook***Table 1.** Possible events over the next eight months that could change the most-likely scenario.

Area	Event	Impact on food security outcomes
National	Poor or delayed start of the rainfall season	Despite forecasts of average to above-average rainfall, Malawi is sometimes hit by episodic weather events such as dry spells and flooding. Poor or delayed start of the 2022/23 rainfall/production season would lead to significant reductions in labor availability that provides in-kind payments and cash for poor and very poor households, likely worsening food security conditions. Besides, it could cause below average production, leading to additional households in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3).
National	Fertilizer scarcity	Malawi's agriculture relies heavily on chemical fertilizers. With the current shortage of foreign currency, fertilizer companies report very minimal availability of fertilizer even to supply the government Affordable Input Program, which provides most poor farmers with subsidized fertilizers. If fertilizer subsidies do not materialize at planned levels, the increased financial pressure on poor households to choose between investing in production and purchasing food could lead to a further reduction in crop yields and a worse-than-anticipated harvest, which repercussions for agricultural labor demand and food prices. This could increase the number of households that are in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3).
National	Extreme weather events such as flooding and dry spells	While a near-normal rainfall and production season is being forecast, the Malawi Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services has observed that episodic weather events are possible with limited predictability. If an unforeseen weather shock occurs, past occurrences have shown that a crop losses and further reductions in associated income sources would be likely, leading to an increase in the size and severity of acute food insecurity.

## AREAS OF CONCERN

### **Lower Shire livelihood zone (MW05), Nsanje District, Southern Region**

#### *Current Situation*

The Lower Shire Valley Livelihood Zone (Figure 2) includes large parts of the Chikwawa and Nsanje districts. It is the southernmost zone in the country and borders Mozambique on its southern edge and the Shire Highlands on its north and eastern boundaries. In addition to livestock, the most important components of the food economy in the zone are food crops, *ganyu* (or casual) labor, and cash crops. The zone has two types of cultivatable land: upland and wetland (*dimba* land) mainly along the Shire River. Winter production, which is less significant than summer production, is carried out in the *dimba* lands bordering the Shire River, including maize, rice, beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables.

The Lower Shire Valley Livelihood Zone is an annual food deficit zone with over 40 percent of annual food stocks met through inflows from other zones. Nsanje's main harvest happened between March and May 2022. Nsanje experienced a delayed start of the season of over a month, was hit by Tropical Storms Ana in January and Gombe in March and endured mid-season dry spells. These factors reduced production and decreased access to food and income. FEWS NET food security assessments in September 2022 found that most households are facing food shortages and are eating twice, once, or nothing per day. Food availability in markets is reported to be average, including the maize staple, owing to inflows from neighboring districts, the central region, and Mozambique. However, maize prices in local markets in Nsanje are trending above last year and the five-year average due to lower locally produced stocks, higher prices in source markets, and general high inflation countrywide. Between October and January, maize prices are expected to trend above the five-year average by around 97 percent and 43 percent above last year. FEWS NET technical price projections in January show that prices will range from 200 MWK/kg to as high as 500 MWK/kg in the outlook period.

During a most recent FEWS NET assessment and Outcome Analysis in September, focus group discussions with community members revealed that most very poor and poor households were consuming one to two meals per day and sometimes nothing as compared to the normal two to three meals daily in the immediate pre-harvest period. Families who have been displaced by floods or had their whole crops and livestock washed away sometimes go an entire day without food. They, therefore, are facing food consumption gaps even immediately after harvest.

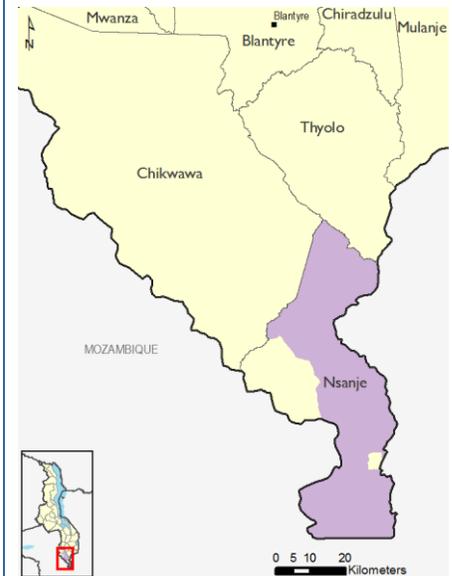
Based on multiple pieces of evidence, including but not limited to field assessment observations and the HEA Outcome Analysis, showed that tens of thousands of very poor and poor households have already been expanding their reliance on alternative livelihood strategies that are typically used in the lean period, including but not limited to increased engagement in casual labor, an atypical increase in firewood sales, and migrating to Mozambique in search of agricultural and mining related work. Typically, these households use this coping from October to March to raise income, as they have yet to harvest income-generating crops. Altogether, however, these income sources remain minimal and insufficient to compensate for the loss of own-produced food stocks and agricultural labor income.

#### *Assumptions*

In addition to the national-level assumptions, the following assumptions apply to this area of concern:

- Traders will continue to supply the maize staple to Nsanje markets from higher-producing neighboring districts in southern Malawi and supply markets in central Malawi districts throughout the outlook period. Overall, supplies will be average to somewhat below average. But transactional costs and high national inflation will lead to high price increases, making maize unaffordable for poor and very poor households.
- Traders will continue sourcing maize from across the border in Mozambique into Nsanje markets. Informal import inflows

**Figure 2.** Reference Map for Lower Shire Livelihood Zone (LSH), Nsanje District



Source: FEWS NET

will likely be average to above average owing to lower stocks in the Nsanje district and the incentive presented by higher-than-normal prices in Nsanje markets.

- Households will continue engaging in self-employment, especially firewood collection and sales, as a coping mechanism to obtain cash for food and basic non-food purchases. However, quantities and hence income will likely be lower as more people target the same market using this strategy.
- Very poor and poor households will likely deploy negative coping strategies as they run out of food within three months after harvest compared to about six months or more in a typical production year. Assessments show that some households harvested nothing from rainfed and winter production, lost assets to floods, and have no income for food purchases; hence, they face food and income gaps in the peak of the lean period.
- Market reliance on food will be above average from October to January and throughout the consumption season since most households harvested little or nothing due to crop destruction by dry spells, stormy rains, and flooding. As a result, more households will rely on market purchases throughout the consumption season without the cushioning that their crop production provides. This will put more pressure on market supplies as well as exert upward pressure on prices.
- Most very poor and poor households will access reduced incomes from labor as middle and better-off households realize reduced incomes due to a poor season. From January to March, households experienced crop and livestock losses due to tropical storms. Middle and better-off households obtain about 25 to 36 percent of their incomes from crop sales, especially cotton. Ministry of Agriculture Production estimates indicates that only 22 percent of normal cotton production has been realized in the 2021/22 season.
- At least 25 percent of the population is expected to receive humanitarian food assistance covering the full caloric requirement for 3 to 5 months in Nsanje district from November to March, based on plans that will be implemented by the government and its humanitarian partners.

#### *Most Likely Food Security Outcomes*

Given the large reduction in annual food and income derived from the 2021/22 crop production season, very poor and poor households have little to no food stocks left to carry them through the lean season. Furthermore, given the widespread severity of the shock that has resulted in a reduction in labor demand and increase in labor supply, they are expected to face increased competition for other sources of food and income and will have little recourse to fill the resultant food and income deficits on their own. At the same time, atypically high food prices will make it increasingly difficult for them to purchase sufficient food as the lean season progresses. Evidence suggests that some households were already consuming one meal per day prior to October. As a result, the start of the humanitarian food assistance program in November will be the main factor preventing further deterioration in food security among the worst-affected members of the population. Given that cash and/or in-kind rations will be sufficient to cover 50-100 percent of their kilocalorie needs from November to March, food consumption is expected to be near normal. They may still experience some difficulty purchasing sufficient agricultural inputs and other essential non-food needs for their livelihoods. As a result, Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are expected in the presence of humanitarian assistance.

### Lake Chilwa Phalombe Plain Livelihood Zone (MW04), Machinga District, Eastern Region

#### Current Situation

The Lake Chilwa & Phalombe Plain Livelihood Zone (Figure 3) occupies parts of the Machinga, Zomba, Mulanje, Phalombe, and Chiradzulu districts. Extending from north of Lake Chiuta down to just northeast of Thyolo and west of Mulanje, the zone encompasses areas surrounding Lake Chilwa and the highland plain of Phalombe. Precipitation reaches as high as 1000 mm a year in some areas but is typically closer to 700 mm. Soils are of poor quality, with sandy to clay loams found throughout the zone. Maize (rainfed and irrigated), rice, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, and pigeon peas are grown for consumption. Due to poor soils and high population density, production potential is relatively poor, especially in the Lake Chirwa Basin, making this a deficit production zone.

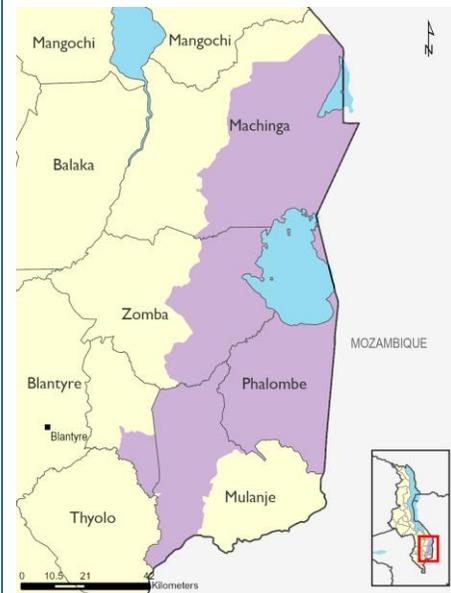
Machinga's crop harvesting period happens between March and May 2022. The 2021/22 rainfall season in Machinga and the Lake Chilwa Phalombe Plain (PHA) livelihood zone was unfavorable for crop production. The area experienced a delayed season with the main first rains from mid-November to early December. Rainfall breaks occurred, leading to delayed planting, permanent wilting, and replanting of crops. Mid-season dry spells and excessive rains led to crop damage that reduced production. Like many districts in the southern region, Machinga was hit by Tropical Storms Ana and Gombe, which led to poor development of crops. Later, the district recorded early cessation of rains leading to premature drying of late planted (replanted) crops, reducing yields and production. Another factor reducing crop production is the low access to subsidized fertilizer and seeds due to limited supply, leading to poor development of crops that reduced yields.

During recent FEWS NET food security assessments in September 2022, community interviews showed that most households have harvested very little or nothing from their staple food crops. FEWS NET also observed that most households did not harvest cash crops, such as cotton, rice, pigeon peas, and groundnuts; these crops failed due to weather hazards and disease. Typically, very poor and poor households in PHA obtain up to 40 percent of their incomes from crop sales and around 30 percent from labor exchange. In the current consumption season, these households have almost zero incomes from crop sales, and projected incomes from labor are expected to fall by 20 to 25 percent from average. Some households that harvested nothing were already facing food gaps and relying on food purchases or temporarily migrating to Mozambique to work for cash and in-kind food payments to cope with food insecurity.

Currently, food availability in markets is average, owing to inflows from neighboring districts and the central region. In September 2022, average maize supply levels at most Machinga markets were expected due to inflows from neighboring districts and the Central Region. Observed maize prices in local markets in Machinga were trending above the same time last year and above the five-year average. In August, maize grain retail prices were 240 MWK per kilogram compared to 150 MWK the previous year and 157 MWK for the five-year average. Prices between October 2022 and May 2023 are expected to trend 94 percent to 112 percent above the five-year and 43 percent to 152 percent above the prices recorded at the same time last year.

By June 2022, some very poor and poor households had already started relying on coping mechanisms usually used in the lean period, such as intensifying casual labor, intensifying firewood sales, and migrating to Mozambique in search of agricultural work for food and cash. Typically, these households use this coping from October to March. The households reported using almost all their incomes for food purchases and neglecting other essential household expenditures. By September, many very poor and poor households were only consuming one meal per day or reducing meals consumed by adults in order to feed their children. Households typically eat mostly maize meal with pulses, little fish, and vegetables. But some are now consuming less-preferred and less-nutritious substitutes – and even resorting to eating maize husks – due to a lack of income to purchase enough maize or alternative staples for consumption.

**Figure 3.** Reference Map for Lake Chilwa Phalombe Livelihood Zone, Machinga District



Source: FEWS NET

### *Assumptions*

In addition to the national-level assumptions, the following assumptions apply to this area of concern:

- Traders will continue to supply the maize staple to Machinga markets from higher-producing districts in central Malawi throughout the outlook period, but supplies are expected to dwindle to below average levels until the next harvest begins in April. Traders will continue sourcing maize from across the border in Mozambique into Machinga markets. Informal import inflows will likely be average to above average owing to lower stocks in the Machinga district and the incentive presented by higher-than-normal prices in Machinga markets. More inflows will result from very poor and poor household members entering neighboring Mozambique to work for in-kind food payments.
- Households will continue engaging in labor and self-employment as a coping mechanism to obtain cash for food and essential non-food purchases, with intensified firewood collection and sales. However, the severity of food insecurity makes more households use extreme and negative coping mechanisms.
- Irrigated crop production will likely be below average due to reductions in available irrigation farming land and the irrigated farming production period due to siltation, water logging, and erosion of the fertile soil. Households also reported constrained access to inputs for irrigated cropping as most households lost assets but lacked income for input purchase. This is expected to reduce the income earning opportunities for the poor and also limit the capacity of those better off to hire labor.
- Prices for the maize staple and other foods will be much higher than last year and compared to the five-year average. FEWS NET's technical price projections in September show that prices would range from 215 MWK/kg to as high as 336 MWK/kg in the outlook period. The higher-than-normal prices will affect the very poor and poor households which normally rely on food purchases for about six months of the consumption year. Estimates show that the buying power for these households has reduced to only one third of normal.
- Middle and better-off households will sell livestock as a coping mechanism to obtain cash for food and non-food purchases, but this source is quickly being exhausted due to the early start of the lean period.
- According to humanitarian food assistance plans, at least 25 percent of the population in Machinga will most likely receive food assistance covering 50-100 percent of their kilocalorie needs from January to March.

### *Most Likely Food Security Outcomes*

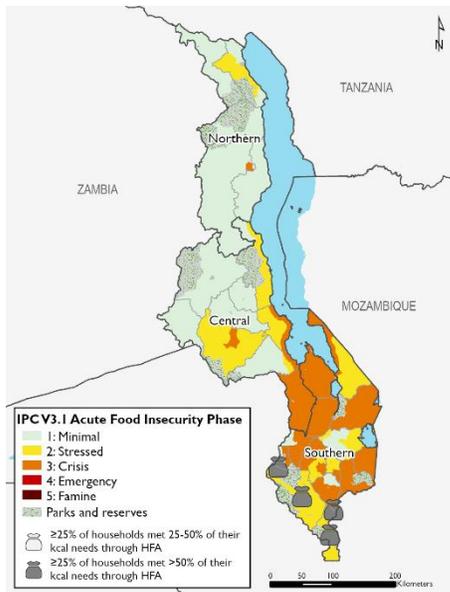
In the October to January period, many very poor and poor households are expected to consume only one meal per day until food assistance deliveries begin in January. Assessments show that slightly over 10 percent of the households harvested nothing, lost assets to floods, and had no income for food purchases; hence they faced food and income gaps in the immediate pre-harvest period, which is typically a time of abundance. Very poor and poor households, which normally have little or no savings, will bear the biggest impact caused by reduced crop production. Households may consume less preferred food or substantially reduce meal portions or resort to more extreme strategies, such as consuming maize husks, going several days without eating due to lack of food access. Households that registered total crop losses due to stormy rains and flooding started facing significant food gaps and were either reducing or missing meals as early as June/July before entering the typical lean season from October. The crop losses have also limited labor opportunities and lowered wages, affecting the poor and very poor who work for income and in-kind food payments.

In the February to May period, humanitarian food assistance will likely alleviate food consumption deficits for beneficiary households in February and March. For households in areas like Phalombe and Mulanje, where food and income losses are slightly less severe, Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are expected, thanks to the role of food assistance in preventing food consumption gaps until the start of the harvest in April. In Machinga, however, the prolonged severity of food consumption gaps means it will take very poor and poor households longer to recover, and prospects for the harvest in April are lower given their time and resources are being diverted to labor migration to meet their immediate food needs. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are therefore expected, given the cessation of food assistance after March.

### MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES AND AREAS RECEIVING SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

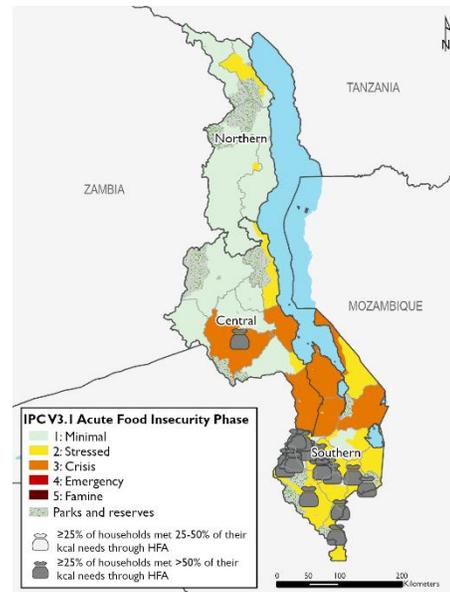
Each of these maps adheres to IPC v3.1 humanitarian assistance mapping protocols and flags where significant levels of humanitarian assistance are being/are expected to be provided. ☼ indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average 25–50 percent of caloric needs from humanitarian food assistance (HFA). ☼ indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average over 50 percent of caloric needs through HFA. This mapping protocol differs from the (!) protocol used in the maps at the top of the report. The use of (!) indicates areas that would likely be at least one phase worse in the absence of current or programmed humanitarian assistance.

Projected food security outcomes, October to January 2023



Source: FEWS NET

Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2023



Source: FEWS NET

FEWS NET’s classifications are IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

*Recommended citation: FEWS NET. Malawi Food Security Outlook, October 2022 to May 2023. Crop losses and high food prices result in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in southern and central Malawi.*

**ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT**

To project food security outcomes, FEWS NET develops a set of assumptions about likely events, their effects, and the probable responses of various actors. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to arrive at the most likely scenario for the coming eight months. [Learn more here.](#)