

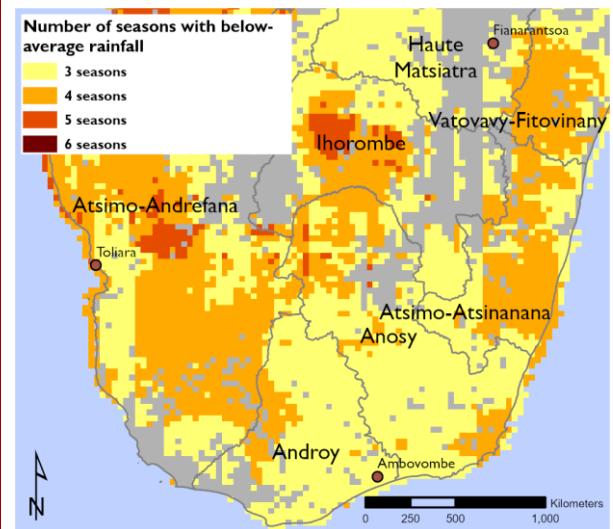
Significant scale-up needed in southern Madagascar to meet large-scale needs through early 2022

Consecutive years of drought in southern Madagascar, compounded by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, have driven high needs and a severe and extended 2020/21 lean season, marked by widespread reporting of hunger, poor dietary diversity, and engagement in unsustainable coping. Available nutrition data also point to significantly higher levels of acute malnutrition than are typically observed at the peak of the lean season. Minimal seasonal improvement in food security is expected between June and September 2021 given anticipated low crop and livestock production. As a result, a high likelihood exists that the 2021/22 lean season will start early and be even more severe than the 2020/21 lean season. Large-scale emergency food assistance, as well as nutrition interventions and livelihoods support, is urgently needed and should be sustained through at least early 2022.

Rainfall was significantly below average in three to five of the past six seasons in southern Madagascar (Figure 1), driving prolonged drought in the region. During the October 2020 to March 2021 season, rainfall was upwards of 30 percent below average and erratically distributed. These deficits have negatively affected crop and livestock production; FEWS NET estimates 2021 crop production in southern Madagascar is 10-30 percent below last year and 50-70 percent below the five-year average. Crop production was also adversely affected by limited access to seeds due to a combination of low household seed stocks following last year's poor season and high seed prices. Additionally, sandstorms, most notably in Ambovombe, affected cassava and maize crops, and Fall Armyworm, in particular in Ampanihy and Amboasary, led to maize crop losses.

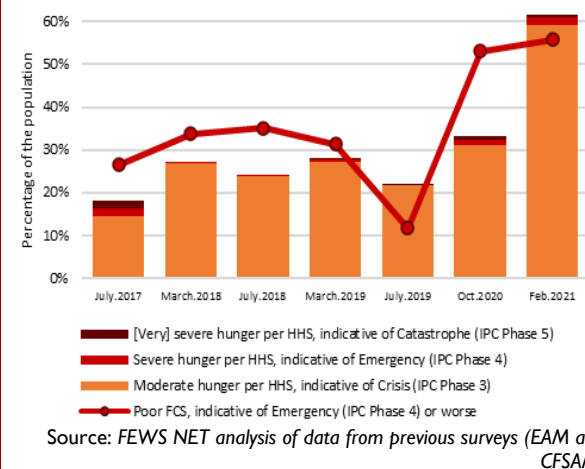
In much of southern Madagascar, the contribution of crop production to total income for very poor and poor households is typically quite low to begin with, and these households tend to rely more heavily on food purchases, with cash income earned through local and migratory labor. Labor migration in the south typically occurs between September and January and atypically high levels of migration occurred from southern Madagascar to more productive regions in January 2021, as people attempted to expand their income in response to the drought. Some households were required to return in February/March due to impending COVID-19 restrictions, resulting in limited income earned through labor migration. Current labor migration to the main rice-producing areas is also limited by COVID-19 restrictions. Harvesting labor opportunities are likely to be available between June and September, but at lower levels than normal due to the poor harvest. Poor households also typically earn income through tending livestock, though livestock conditions have been negatively affected by poor pasture and water, which has driven increasing livestock deaths and distress sales. Middle and better off households, who would typically hire these poorer household members, have less income on hand, and fewer livestock to manage, resulting in fewer labor opportunities in this sector as well.

Figure 1. Number of seasons since 2015/16 in which October-March rainfall was less than 85 percent of average



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Evolution of Food Consumption Score (FCS) and Household Hunger Scale (HHS) in southern Madagascar* from available surveys, July 2017-February 2021



Source: FEWS NET analysis of data from previous surveys (EAM and CFSAM)

*Weighted average of results in Amboasary, Ambovombe, Ampanihy, Beloha, Betsioky, Taolagnaro, Tsihombe, and Tuléar II

Compounding the impacts of this lower labor-related income, staple food prices are above average, resulting in significant declines in purchasing power for all households. The price of dried cassava, the main staple purchased by many poorer households, is 20-70 percent above last year and 70-140 percent above the five-year average, while the price of maize is 10-80 percent above last year and more than double the five-year average. While the price of dried cassava will likely decrease after the harvest in June, prices are expected to remain at least 35 percent higher than what is typical for the harvesting period. Maize prices are similarly expected to remain at least twice as high as the five-year average throughout 2021, with further price increases likely after October, when the typical lean season begins.

Data collected between February and April 2021, during the peak of the 2020/2021 lean season, serve to highlight the severity of acute food insecurity at that time. The results of a February EDCASA survey showed a significant increase in self-reported hunger and poor dietary diversity when compared to previous surveys (Figure 2). Most relevant are the comparisons to March 2018 and 2019, which correspond to previous lean seasons, and which show much lower levels of self-reported food insecurity. Households also reported high engagement in negative and unsustainable coping in an effort to meet their food needs, some of which are indicative of Emergency (IPC Phase 4) including moving their whole household due to a lack of food or money to buy food. The results of MUAC screenings carried out in late March/early April 2021 by the Nutrition Cluster found a doubling in the proportion of children under five years old with acute malnutrition (MUAC <12.5cm) when compared to the same quarter of 2019 in four districts. Preliminary results of a SMART nutrition survey conducted in April and May 2021 reported a GAM (WHZ) prevalence of 23.3 percent (17.5 – 30.3) in Ambovombe, indicative of Emergency (IPC Phase 4), and of 14.3 percent (10.8 – 18.7) in Amboasary, indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3). The crude death rate in both districts was indicative of Stressed (IPC Phase 2), at 0.54 to 0.84 per 10,000 people per day, respectively.

It is anticipated that the ongoing delivery of humanitarian food assistance, as well as nutrition and WASH interventions, are mitigating the severity of acute food insecurity and malnutrition outcomes. However, the scale of need exceeds that of the current response: widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes already exist across southern Madagascar, with populations in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and some worst-affected households in Ambovombe and Amboasary likely facing Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Continued area-level Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes, with households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), are likely through September. Significantly worse outcomes than are typical during the post-harvest period are expected. In the absence of a scale-up of external support, the 2021/22 lean season will begin early and be even more severe than the recent 2020/21 lean season. Large-scale humanitarian assistance, including food, nutrition interventions, and livelihoods support is needed now through early 2022.