• In the south, drought conditions over the past two years, extremely high food prices, and the delay in the start of rains this season are the main causes of prevailing food insecurity, particularly in inland Gaza and Inhambane and parts of Maputo provinces. As a result of seasonal rains, the impact of drought has been minimized. Water for human and animal consumptions improved greatly and green maize, cowpeas, and peanuts are increasingly available. In Nampula, food security has become a significant concern for households in Mogincual District, due to multiple hazards.

• Despite dry spells over the last month, the current cropping season is progressing well in most places. Crops are now reaching the flowering to maturity stage and there are places where harvests have already started. Additional rain will be required through the end of March in places where planting started late.

• Maize price increases have been higher this year than in previous years. The continuously high price of maize and the inability of poor households to generate income following last season’s poor harvests have reduced the ability of households to access enough quality food on markets, even though food is available.

• Prices remain well above the five-year average and prices last years in the whole country. While normally seasonal price drops are expected in February/March, in anticipation of the harvest onset, this year effective and significant drops will probably occur later.
In southern and parts of central Mozambique, there are localized pockets of food insecurity. Most of the food insecure households are the poorest and those without able-bodied members and are unable to employ sustainable coping strategies, such as income earning through selling of fire wood, charcoal, crops, and animals, or any other available strategies. In the south, drought conditions over the past two years, extremely high food prices, and the delayed start of rains this season are the main causes of prevailing food insecurity, particularly in inland Gaza, Inhambane, and parts of Maputo provinces. However, thanks to recent widespread rains, the impact of drought has been mitigated in most areas: water sources have been replenished and vegetation has become abundant. Households are able to gather wild crops now available, such as cacao, and are benefiting from seasonal crops. Also, in response to the delayed start of rains, agriculture authorities have provided short-cycle maize seeds. In addition, in parts of the south, newly harvested maize, beans, and peanuts are available.

In October 2008, the Vulnerability Assessment Group of the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition (GAV/SETSAN) had recommended food assistance approximately 356,500 food insecure persons until the next main cereal harvest in April 2009. This assistance would help ensure that the nutritional status of children and adults would not deteriorate, avoid household assets depletion, and ensure that farmers have enough strength for this season’s agricultural activities, while preventing over consumption of green crops, which are consumed at the expense of later harvests. Despite this need, food distributions to date have not reached targeted levels, mainly due to resource constraints. WFP’s operational plan for the period of January to April will only meet 55 percent of the current needs, covering only 197,933 people, compared to the VAC assessed needs of 356,500 people.

In the north, the food security situation is critical in Mogincual, a coastal district in southern Nampula. Households in this district are vulnerable when rains are poor, and to cyclones, as the district is within the northern end of the cyclone belt. The main staple food is cassava, which is also the main agricultural crop for all types of households. Some rice and maize are also grown where soil conditions allow. Cassava is usually intercropped with pulses, mainly cowpeas and pigeon peas. Income for the wealthier households is generated through sales of cashew nut, groundnuts, and cassava. Cashew trees are widespread across the zone and in the interior zones in the province, owned and managed on a small scale at the household level, with most families owning at least a few trees. The very poor and poor households earn most of their money from selling their labor, about half of which is in agriculture. As in the other districts in southern coastal Nampula, although households suffer from chronic poverty and under-development, in a normal year, the majority in the districts has enough food throughout the year, and most households can meet their basic minimum needs. Normally, food purchases take up the majority of the very poor’s income, around half of this for staple food (mainly dry cassava with a little maize flour). The poor also spend about the same on staple foods, but this is because they buy more expensive maize flour.

Currently, a combination of the effects of the (i) Cyclone Jokwe that made landfall in Mogincual District in coastal Nampula Province on March 8, 2008, and drastically affected southeastern Nampula and caused widespread destruction to housing, infrastructure, and crops, and caused at least nine deaths; (ii) poor soils; (iii) the brown streak virus disease of cassava that has reduced cassava harvests; (iv) poor 2007/08 second season, and (v) high food prices, is making the food security for more than half of the population in Mogincual worrisome. A team composed by representatives of SETSAN at National and Provincial levels, and the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC Nampula) visited the district of Mogincual, among others. The assessment team recommended immediate food assistance to about 35,000 people in Mogincual, until April 2009, when the first harvest will take place. The main reasons are as it follows:

- There are no food reserves at the household levels given the impact of Cyclone Jokwe, a weak second season, and poor rainfall thus far into the season.
- This season’s crops are in various stages of development as result of various planting attempts.
- Being in coastal area, small scale fishing exists. Nevertheless the fishing catch is for household consumption. Very little is conserved and sold due to lack of conservation facilities and limited purchase power, respectively.
The households lack cash income for food purchases as their main source (crops) failed, and cashew nut income is limited as most of the trees were damaged by Cyclone Jokwe, and some of the existing trees are old and not well treated. The poor are unable to expand the sale of their labor during the lean period, which usually runs from December to March. Part of the income the households generated was used to rebuild after Cyclone Jokwe.

The number of daily meals has been reduced to one. The meals’ composition is very poor, composed mainly by cassava leaves. Currently to compensate for food deficits, the poorer households are consuming wild foods and bitter cassava that is highly toxic. Normally, to compensate for lost food or income, they have few alternatives except to increase the sale of their labor.

Food is available at the markets albeit at very high prices. A kg of staple (dried cassava flour) is 12 Meticais, while a dried cassava piece cost 1.5-3 Meticais each. The very high food prices are exacerbating the lack of access to food.

Apparently, the physical aspects of children are unhealthy, and it was reported that the adult members are do not have enough energy for work in the fields.

A rapid food security assessment, led by GAV/SETSAN with partner support, is planned for late February/early March. The assessment is expected to last for 10 days and the final report is expected to be released in late March 2009. Specific objectives of the assessment are:

- Evaluate and describe the current situation in the districts with food insecure conditions;
- Determine the locations and number of affected people;
- Determine and recommend the type and level of needs; and
- Describe possible food security scenarios in the future.

The methodology will include field visits where teams will meet administrative authorities, disaster management officials, and representatives from agriculture, health, education, and other sectors, including NGOs. Interviews will be conducted with community, traditional, and religious leaders, teachers, women, and others; visits will include markets and interviews with traders and consumers; at least three selected communities will be visited in each district, where team members will have opportunity make ground observations; and secondary data will be reviewed and analyzed.

**Southern and central zones facing water stress**

Parts of the southern and central zones of Mozambique have been receiving well below normal rains or even facing occasional dry spells since the beginning of the year. This is more critical in the southern Gaza and northern Maputo province, where cumulative rains from January 1 to February 20, 2009 have been only between 19 to 25 percent of normal, and parts of southern Sofala province where cumulative rain is ranging between 27 and 35 percent of normal.

**Figura 2** Satellite rainfall estimate anomalies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-10 Jan 2009</th>
<th>11-20 Jan 2009</th>
<th>21-31 Jan 2009</th>
<th>1-10 Feb 2009</th>
<th>11-20 Feb 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much More</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fonte: USGS/FEWS NET

However, according to the latest crop assessment from the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG), combined with field information, the impact on crops has been minimal. Exceptions include northern Maputo Province, where dry spells over
the last twenty days have put this season’s crop at risk. In some areas of Magude District, for instance, crops are wilting. In Sofala Province, some crops that were under stress few days ago and in urgent need of water are now benefiting from widespread rains that are now occurring in the central and southern zones. In Manica Province, bordering Zimbabwe, the picture is very promising. Crops are now reaching the flowering to maturity stage, and there are places where harvest has already started (especially in the lowlands). Crops in Manica Province, a very productive province in Mozambique, are generally in good condition. Despite the preoccupying picture shown by the remote sensing analysis, ground field information indicates that the current cropping season is progressing well, but additional rain through the end of March will be required in places where planting started late.

Cropping season update

The Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG), through its Early Warning and Crops Department from the Directorate of Agrarian services (DNSA) has undertaken a mid season crop assessment from January 25 to February 8, 2009. The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the current cropping season. The assessment took place in 43 selected districts of all provinces. The selected districts are those known to be facing problems with crop pests, disease, or adverse agroclimatic conditions and those where the government’s Intensification Plan for Production of Food (PAPA) is ongoing.

According to the preliminary findings from the assessment, national cereal production is expected to grow by 17 percent from the previous year, while the production of pulses (beans and groundnuts) are expected to increase by 7 percent, and cassava is expected to be greater than last season by 7 percent. Comparisons with recent averages were not available. This expected increase in the overall production is attributed not only to better agroclimatic conditions compared to the previous season, but also to the government’s agricultural intensification plan, PAPA.

So far, the current cropping season has been promising, taking into account the good agroclimatic conditions and the timely provision of agriculture inputs, especially seeds, through input trade fairs and through the government’s agricultural intensification. It is however crucial to monitor the progress of the cropping season during the remaining period, given that rains must extend longer than normal to allow effective maturity due to the delayed start of rains.

South (Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane): Rains began late, especially in Inhambane Province. Planting started in November/December and 90 percent of the planned area has been planted. The distribution of rains have been regular in Maputo and Gaza but irregular in Inhambane (coastal zone), with excessive rains in late December. Normal to below normal rains have been recorded in January and now in February. Cultivated crops include maize, beans, groundnuts, rice, and cassava. Overall, crops are in good condition and in vegetative to flowering stages and maturity. Crop pests and diseases include maize stalk borer and elegant grasshopper but have not had a significant impact. The overall production prospects are good if rains continue through the end of the season.

Center (Manica, Sofala, Zambezia and Tete): Rains began late, and planting started in November/December. About 90 percent of the planned area has been planted. Rains have been irregular, especially during the last 20 days of January. Good rainfall was recorded in early February. Cultivated crops include maize, sorghum, millet, rice, beans, groundnuts, sesame, soy bean, and cassava. Overall, crops are in good condition and in vegetative to flowering stages and maturity. Crop disease and pests, including army worm, are affecting maize crops, especially in Dondo, Beira, Nhamatanda, Marromeu, and Maringue districts in Sofala Province, although the impact has not been significant. In Manica Province, army worms have been observed in Tambara, Manica, Sussundenga, Gondola, Chimoio, and Barue, but control measures were promptly taken and infestations are no longer a threat. The overall production prospects are good thus far if rains continue through the end of the season.
North (Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Niassa): Good start of rains with planting starting in December. About 90 to 95 percent of the planned area has been planted. Rains have been below normal, especially in the coastal zone of Nampula and in Cabo Delgado. Cultivated crops include maize, sorghum, millet, rice, beans, groundnuts, sesame, and cassava. Overall, crops are in good condition and in vegetative to flowering stages and maturity. Crop diseases and pests, including elegant grasshopper, leaf May-bug, and snails, have had no significant impact. The overall production prospects are good, especially in the interior zone and over the plateau.

River basins fluctuating

During the current year, the river basins in Mozambique have had an oscillatory behavior with tendency to stabilize. From February 26 the Buzi River and its tributaries have been above alert levels due to heavy rainfall that has been falling in the central zone since February 24. Localized inundations have occurred in lowlands of Goonda, Grudja, Estaquinha, and Vila de Buzi. Early warning systems have been activated and the situation is under the control of local authorities through disaster risk management committees. According to the latest information from the National Directorate of Water (DNA), the situation has returned to normal.

The Zambezi, Limpopo, and Pungue river basins had two moderate peaks. In the Zambezi basin, the first peak occurred in early December when the river height went above the alert level in Caia hydrometric station and in Marromeu hydrometric station. The second peak happened in early February but did not last as long as the first peak. In Pungue there were two peaks, one in early January and the other in mid January. Both peaks went up above the alert level but were very brief (less than a day of duration). More prolonged peaks have occurred in another hydrometric station of Pungue in Mafambisse. The first peak have occurred in late December and lasted for almost a month followed by a short peak in mid February. In Limpopo River Basin, river height rose above the alert level in early February and remained so for about 15 days. In all cases, water authorities have played an important role in early warning. Government authorities including disaster management authorities, the humanitarian community, and the population in general were informed on time about the flood waves and advised to take precautionary measures. In the Limpopo Basin, for instance, farmers were told in advance to withdraw farming and irrigation equipment to safe places. Inundated croplands that were located in flood plain areas were lost (estimated to be about 2,300 hectares). In the Zambezi basin, thanks to previous flood events in the Zambezi Basin, most people from at-risk areas have already abandoned the area and are now in secure places.

Prices still increasing in some key markets

Following the trend since last year, maize prices are still increasing in some reference markets. In Nampula (north) and Chokwe (south), prices from December 2008 to January 2009 have risen by 2 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Although price increases are normal at this time of year, the impact is more severe this year as prices are already at unusually high levels. However, in some markets, January maize prices have decreased, such as in Manica (center), where prices have decreased by 12 percent. In general, current prices are still well above the five year average and those of last year. In Chokwe and Maputo, two reference markets in the south, maize prices in January were 100 and 35 percent above the five-
year average and 27 and 61 percent above last year’s prices, respectively. In Manica and Nampula, January maize prices were 189 and 85 percent above the average and 145 and 41 percent above the same period of last year, respectively (figure 4). As mentioned in previous FEWS NET reports, the main driving factor behind the high food prices is the decline in household food reserves, which has been more significant this year than in recent years. Other factors could include lack of government grain reserves, increasing demand for maize by small and medium-scale milling companies, and the high cost of fuel since the beginning of the current marketing year. For the particular case of Manica, a border town with Zimbabwe, one should take into account the high demand of food commodities not only by locals but also by hundreds of Zimbabweans that daily cross the border into Mozambique.

While normally seasonal price drops are expected in February/March, in anticipation of the harvest onset, this year effective and significant drops will probably occur a month later due to the expected delay in the effective onset of the harvest. In a bad harvest year, most households rely on the markets to purchase food, but the currently extreme high prices limit the amounts that poor and middle-income households can afford. Higher prices of maize will reduce their ability to access enough quality food for household consumption.

**Figure 4.** Nominal maize retail prices in reference markets, in Meticais per kg

The latest bulletin from the Agriculture Market Information System (SIMA), published on February 18, 2009, indicates that maize and beans from the current season are already flowing into the markets. Recently harvested maize has been observed in Chokwe, Mocuba, and Milange. Recently harvested beans were observed in Tete City, Macanga, and Namuno. However, the new commodities are still arriving only in small quantities.
Maize, rice, and beans are the most important food commodities. Maize is the staple food for the poor, with rice most often used as a substitute. Beans are important to all wealth groups. Each of the markets represented here act as indicators for the broader region. Tete is representative for the province by the same name, Nampula is the main market in the north and is representative for the region, and has linkages with the interior of Zambezia and Nampula provinces and coastal Nampula. Beira, Gorongosa, and Manica are indicators for the center. Beira market has links with the Gorongosa market, which has links with southern markets. The Chokwe and Maputo markets in the south are linked to the Chimoio, Manica, and Gorongosa markets in the central region. Chokwe is the reference market for the southern region, except Maputo, the capital.