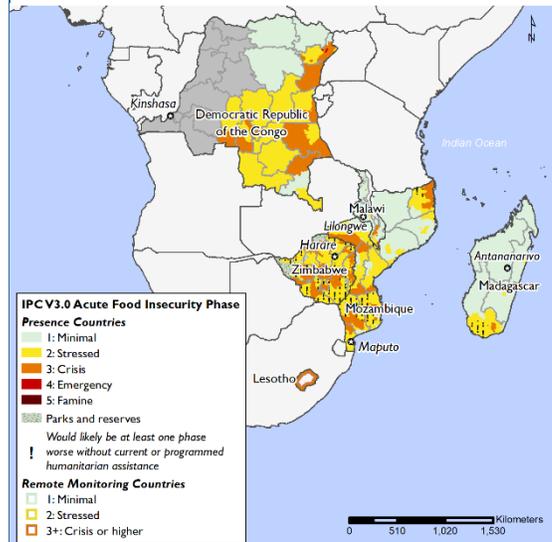


Impacts of drought, COVID-19, and conflict driving increased acute food insecurity in Southern Africa

KEY MESSAGES

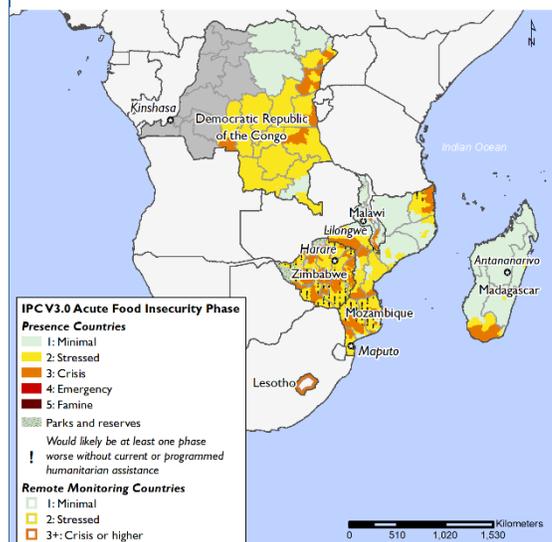
- Poor households in low production areas, including southern parts of Mozambique, Madagascar, Malawi, and greater parts of Zimbabwe and conflict-affected areas of DRC are expected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes through May. In these areas, own produced food was enough for only up to three months and since September, they started relying mainly on market purchases. From October to January, parts of Ituri Province worst-affected by conflict in DRC and some households in southern Madagascar affected by consecutive droughts are expected to experience Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes.
- Parts of the region have started receiving sporadic rainfall; however, the 2020/21 rainfall season had yet to start across many areas as of late-October. Some households have started planting in some areas of FEWS NET monitored countries where rainfall has fallen; however, this is not widespread. This is particularly important for poor households in deficit areas who need incomes from casual labor for market purchases. However, as more poor households seek casual labor opportunities, increasing labor supply, and generally wage rates are likely to be lower than average and affect household purchasing power.
- The 2020/21 period's overall seasonal performance is expected to be favorable with a forecast for average rainfall with above-average rainfall most likely in Northern Malawi and Mozambique. This is leading to favorable production prospects across the region. Timely and good rainfall performance will also result in households improving food consumption from March when the green harvest is expected, followed by the main harvest in April and May.
- In most parts of the region, COVID-19 related lockdowns have since been suspended and relaxed. Despite these improvements, poor households in urban and peri-urban areas continue facing difficulties obtaining sufficient food and income as most formal and informal businesses are still operating at minimal levels. For some countries, in October restrictions on key activities like cross border trade continued. With limited income to purchase food from markets, the worst-affected poor urban and peri-urban households in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, and DRC are experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) due to the impacts of the COVID-19 restriction measures, which affected income through both formal and informal employment.

Projected food security outcomes, October 2020 to January 2021



Source: FEWS NET

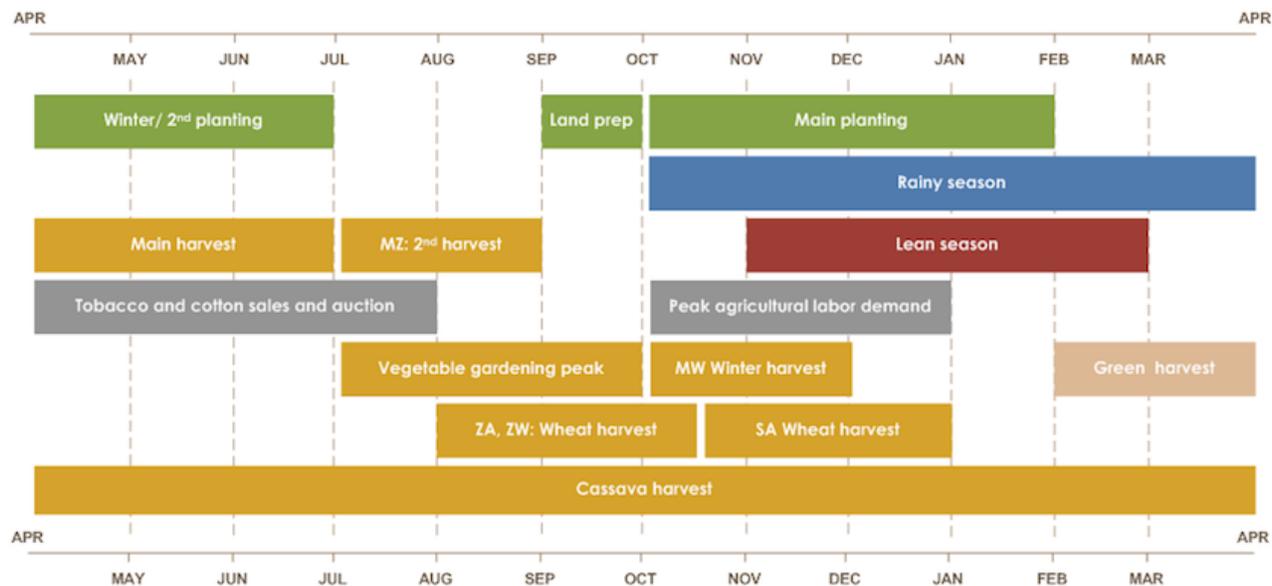
Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2020



Source: FEWS NET

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

SEASONAL CALENDAR IN A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: FEWS NET

OUTLOOK BY COUNTRY

Democratic Republic of the Congo

- Growing season A started on time in the eastern part of the country. While it is experiencing normal rainfall, the season is impacted by low household participation because of the pandemic and insecurity throughout the region. This situation suggests that there will be poor performance during the growing season, with lower than normal harvests expected.
- The spread of COVID-19 in 21 of the country's 26 provinces continues to affect populations' livelihoods. Restrictive measures have been reduced since the health emergency was declared over in August 2020. As a result, certain borders have reopened and activities have gradually resumed across the country. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), however, nearly 39 percent of heads of household remain unable to carry out their activities due to the effects of the pandemic throughout the country.
- At this time of year, despite the relative lull observed in the provinces of Ituri, Tanganyika, and Maniema, there are still many displaced households that have abandoned their livelihoods. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the third quarter of 2020 counted 92,137 displaced individuals with a 42 percent rate of return. This situation reinforces the expectation of low participation in the current growing season.
- Considering the lull noted in certain eastern zones, during the peak of the 2020 lean season the food security situation could transition to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in the more stable northern and central zones, including the provinces of Haut-Uele, Bas-Uele, and Tshopo and a portion of the Kasai region. Meanwhile, the Irumu territory in Ituri; Beni, Masisi, and Rutshuru in North Kivu; and Nyunzu, Kabalo, and Manono in Tanganyika will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). The Djugu territory will remain in Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

To learn more, see the [October 2020 Democratic Republic of Congo Food Security Outlook](#).

Madagascar

- Drought in southern areas, and subsequent crop losses and lower labor opportunities, is driving high needs. In October, available information points to area-level Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes, with some worst-affected households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), already occurring in the lead up to the typical lean season. Large-scale assistance is anticipated between November and January and, in the presence of this assistance, many beneficiaries will be able to minimally meet their food needs, driving Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes at the area-level. However, it is likely some

poor households will still be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4), and area-level outcomes would be more severe in the absence of this assistance.

- National rice and cassava productions in 2019/20 were near the five-year average while that of maize decreased because of rainfall deficits that affected main producing areas of southern Madagascar in early 2020. Agricultural labor is currently near average at the national level because of near normal beginning of the 2020/21 rainy season, but below normal in the south where seeds are less accessible due to the below normal production in the previous season. Non-agricultural labor, particularly in urban areas and in touristic areas, is below normal as result of COVID-19 pandemic, which limited opportunities.
- Main food supplies were disturbed during the COVID-19 emergency state in Madagascar both for locally produced and imported staple food. Supply has returned to near-normal levels, but as traders remain mistrustful about the evolution of COVID-19 and anticipate higher prices in the peak of lean season in February, the volume of staples sold at markets remains below average and prices are above normal..

To learn more, see the [October 2020 Madagascar Food Security Outlook](#).

Malawi

- Minimal (IPC Phase 1) outcomes are expected to persist across most of the country through at least May 2021. However, poor households in some southern districts and the central Salima district are expected to run out of own-produced food atypically early. Most of these areas are already facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes and are expected to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) between November 2020 and January 2021. In April and May 2021, conditions will improve to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) as households access food and income from the 2021 harvests. In urban areas, outcomes are expected to improve to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) around December 2020 as the economy recovers.
- According to national and international forecasts, La Niña conditions are expected to persist through March/April 2021. This will likely result in average to above-average rainfall across Malawi during the 2020/2021 rainy season. As a result, average 2020/2021 production is expected, which will support access to income from agricultural labor opportunities. However, income-earning will likely be below average in areas facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes due to reduced purchasing power among those who hire labor.
- According to FEWS NET price projections, maize grain prices are expected to follow seasonal trends but remain above five-year average levels throughout the projection period. Typical seasonal price increases are expected in the coming months, driven by increasing demand as more households run out of own-produced food. Demand from government institutions who plan to buy 200,000 to 400,000 MT of maize grain will also put upward pressure on prices.
- Due to a significant reduction in COVID-19 cases in recent months, the government has re-opened airports, re-opened schools, and lifted other restrictions. This has led to a pickup in economic activity, generally increasing income-earning opportunities for households impacted by layoffs, business closures, and reduced demand for labor and trade. However, income-earning is not yet back to normal

To learn more, see the [October 2020 Malawi Food Security Outlook](#).

Mozambique

- Currently, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes prevail in areas affected by drought in the south and conflict in Cabo Delgado. Humanitarian food assistance is planned and likely to increase in November, after which time Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are expected to prevail, in the southern drought-affected areas, through May 2021. Conversely, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes will begin to emerge in October in southern Tete and northern Manica provinces due to below-average household food stocks and limited household purchasing power limiting food access. Many areas that were affected by Cyclone Idai in 2019 continue facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes.
- In urban and peri-urban areas, despite some relaxation in COVID-19 control measures, and the border reopening with South Africa, poor households continue to face difficulty obtaining sufficient food and income due to continued restrictions on the operation of small income-generating businesses. With limited income to purchase food from markets, the worst-affected poor urban and peri-urban households are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

- Humanitarian food assistance is ongoing and likely to continue until at least March 2021. Most assistance will likely be directed towards the internally displaced people (IDPs) in Cabo Delgado, drought-affected households in southern and central regions, and households recovering from Cyclone Idai. However, current and planned assistance for IDPs is likely insufficient to meet needs due to the flow of displaced households and improve outcomes among beneficiaries. Humanitarian assistance is likely to improve area-level outcomes to Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) in drought-affected areas. Current food assistance is assessed to cover less than half of FEWS NET's estimated food assistance needs from November 2020 to March 2021, and some households are likely to remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).
- Except for conflict zones where affected households have deviated from their typical agricultural activities, a favorable 2020/2021 agricultural season is expected across Mozambique. Land preparation began in much of the south and parts of central Mozambique after the first rains in early October. However, cumulative rainfall is still insufficient for successful planting, and most rural households are waiting for the November rains to begin seasonal planting. With average rainfall forecast for much of the country, agricultural activities, including agricultural work, are expected to occur at normal levels, except in conflict zones where agricultural activity involvement will be well below average.

[To learn more, see the October 2020 Mozambique Food Security Outlook.](#)

Zimbabwe

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to persist across most typical food deficit areas in the south, west, and extreme north through at least March 2021. This is the result of ongoing poor macroeconomic conditions, consecutive droughts, and continued COVID-19 impacts. Significant humanitarian assistance is expected to improve food access with Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) expected to persist in targeted areas. Surplus-producing areas in the north will most likely face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) as own-produced food stocks deplete, and market reliance increases. Most urban areas are also expected to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2).
- Early season rainfall was received in October across most parts of the country, which led to increased land preparation activities; however, planting of rain-fed crops has not started in most areas as the season is yet to be fully established. Cumulative rainfall for the 2020/21 rainfall season is expected to be average. This will likely result in near-normal cropped areas and close to average crop production for the 2020/21 production season.
- Poor macroeconomic conditions, marked by a very high inflation rate, are expected to continue throughout the outlook period. Despite the stabilization in the exchange rates and prices of some goods on the markets, food prices will remain significantly above average and out of reach of most poor households as incomes are expected to remain constrained. However, increased earnings in USD, especially in the informal sector, are improving food access as such households are able to purchase goods in USD.
- Based on current low import levels, the 2020/21 national cereal gap of nearly 1 million MT is unlikely to be closed by the end of the marketing year in March 2021. Maize and maize meal supplies will continue to be below average across most markets. Some more remote markets are expected to have limited to no stocks, especially in January to March, the peak lean season.
- Due to reduced infection rates and relaxation of most COVID-19 measures, households have restarted or increased engagement in typical income-earning activities, particularly in the informal sector. However, some residual impacts of the restriction measures coupled with the poor economic conditions are expected to result in continued below normal income across much of the country. Even with the anticipated reopening of the national borders, associated livelihood activities are expected to remain below normal.

[To learn more, see the October 2020 Zimbabwe Food Security Outlook.](#)

Countries Monitored Remotelyⁱ

Lesotho

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes persist in Lesotho. The relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions by the government in early October is likely to stimulate economic activity and improve household opportunities to engage in livelihood activities. The reopening of normalized border crossings in early October between Lesotho and South Africa is expected to increase informal border trade opportunities and provide migrant workers with access to South African labor markets.

There are still COVID-19 control measures in place, including the need for travel permits by migrant workers. Access to informal cross-border trade is anticipated to gradually improve economic and income-earning opportunities for households affected by the border closures.

- In October 2020, the UN World Food Program (WFP) began implementing a six-month crisis response program to address growing food insecurity driven by poor crop production and COVID-19 impacts on livelihood activities. Approximately 5,600 households receive 811 LSL (50 USD) cash and voucher interventions per month in Thaba Tseka and Mokhotlong. The interventions are improving food access for the targeted households. Poor households that are not receiving assistance are likely to face increasing food consumption gaps as the lean season progresses.
- International and local forecasts indicate that Lesotho should expect a cumulatively average rainy season. Many households anticipate improving household food stocks and income following the past consecutive poor seasons. As rainfall onset dates are approaching in late October/early November, farmers will intensify preparations for the upcoming agriculture season. Land preparation is ongoing, with some households dry planting maize. However, limited residual moisture in the mountains is reducing the rate of early and dry planting.

To learn more, see the [October 2020 Lesotho Remote Monitoring Report](#).

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
Southern Africa	Resurgence of COVID 19 and increase in government restrictions	Resurgence of COVID 19 infections in the region will result in more hard lockdowns which will further harm income from both informal and informal sectors in urban areas. For rural areas this will significantly affect household income for both staple and agriculture input purchases. The region will see a surge in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and higher population.
Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Zimbabwe	COVID - 19 related border closures by South Africa	These countries depend heavily on South Africa incomes from seasonal agriculture labor and remittances. In the event COVID – 19 cases start increasing again and SA closes borders, incomes from the above sources will significantly drop and will result in increase in poor households increasing Crisis food insecurity outcomes
Southern Africa	Poor Rainfall Distribution	The prospects of average to above average rainfall in Southern Africa may result in another poor production if the rainfall is going to be poorly distributed.

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 a most likely scenario for the coming eight months. [Learn more here](#).

ⁱ With remote monitoring, an analyst typically works from a nearby regional office, relying on a network of partners for data. Compared to countries above, where FEWS NET has a local office, reporting on remote monitoring countries may offer less detail.