

Widespread drought and flooding from Cyclone Idai drive high assistance needs through early 2020

In early February, FEWS NET released an [Alert](#) on the poor progress of Southern Africa’s October 2018 to March 2019 rainy season. Through the remainder of the season, western and central areas received only light to moderate rainfall. End-of-season rainfall totals were less than 55 percent of normal across most of the region and drought conditions persisted in several areas. In addition, Tropical Cyclone Idai hit the eastern coast of Mozambique in mid-March, resulting in widespread flooding and high-speed winds across central Mozambique, eastern Zimbabwe, and southern Malawi. This resulted in over 850 known deaths, significant displacement, loss of livestock, and destruction of infrastructure and croplands. The ongoing drought coupled with the negative impacts of Cyclone Idai have driven atypically high assistance needs that are expected to persist through at least early 2020, and humanitarian actors and national governments should plan for higher than normal food assistance and livelihood support needs throughout this time.

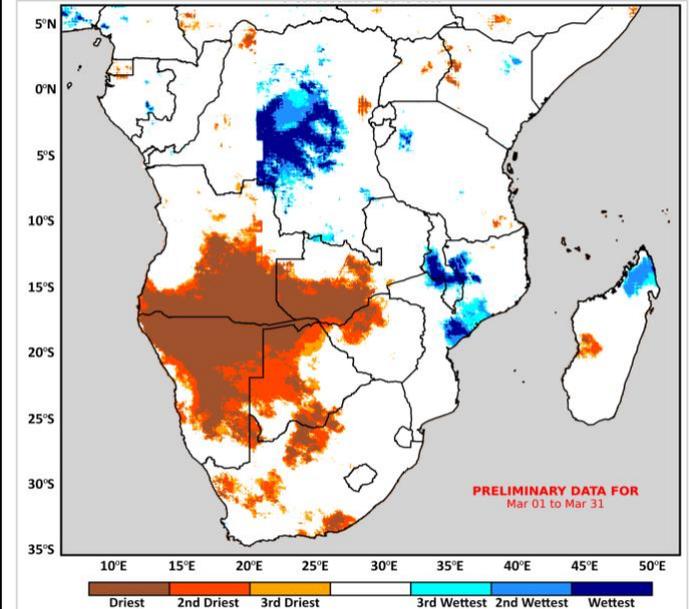
Rainfall during Southern Africa’s 2018/19 rainy season started nearly a month late, was characterized by extended dry spells between January and March, and concluded with historically low rainfall totals in many central and western parts of the region (Figure 1). Areas of Botswana, northern Zimbabwe, eastern Namibia, southern Angola, and surplus-producing areas of northern South Africa and southern Zambia registered a D3 (Extreme) or D4 (Exceptional) drought according to the [United States Drought Monitor classification scale](#).

Conversely, rainfall totals in Malawi and much of Mozambique were already above average prior to Cyclone Idai, which made landfall as a Category 4 storm in central Mozambique on March 14. The cyclone transitioned into a tropical depression as it traveled across central Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe, driving further heavy rainfall through March 21 across these areas and Malawi. Central Mozambique was the hardest hit, receiving more than 300 millimeters of rainfall in a 24-hour period in Beira City with sustained wind speeds over 170 km/hour. Nearly 1.5 million people were impacted, 161,000 people were displaced, and almost 600 people were killed in Mozambique, though many areas remain inaccessible and the full extent of the damage is still unknown. Although Beira port was cutoff for roughly six days, access has resumed. In Zimbabwe, Chimanimani and Chipinge districts were significantly impacted and remain mostly inaccessible following infrastructure damage. An estimated 250,000 people in Zimbabwe were affected, 4,500 of whom were displaced. In Southern Malawi, roughly 860,000 people were affected and close to 87,000 people were displaced.

The widespread drought and flooding following Cyclone Idai have together driven extensive crop losses in many areas of the region and below-average production is likely in most countries, including in South Africa and Zambia, which are key contributors to regional maize supply. Recent field visits conducted by the USDA in collaboration with FEWS NET and partners corroborate drought-related crop losses in southern Zambia and northern Zimbabwe. As a result of flooding and high-speed winds following Cyclone Idai, over 700,000 hectares (ha) of crops were lost in central Mozambique and about 30,000 ha in southern Malawi at the start of the harvest period. In eastern Zimbabwe, most areas remain inaccessible but initial estimates indicate roughly 24,000 ha of crops have been destroyed.

Despite expected below-average 2019 maize production, [FEWS NET expects](#) that regional maize supply during the 2019/20 marketing year will still be average due largely to carryover stocks from last year’s bumper harvest in South Africa. Currently, maize grain prices are trending near or slightly above the five-year average across the region and this trend is expected to continue in most areas, and prices are not anticipated to reach the high levels observed in 2016. However, maize prices are expected to be well above average in drought-affected areas with localized supply deficits, flood-affected areas of Mozambique, and in Zimbabwe where both drought and

Figure 1. Rainfall rank based on CHIRPS final data from Oct. 1, 2018 to Feb. 28, 2019 and CHIRPS prelim data for March 1-31, 2019



Source: UCSB/USGS

macroeconomic issues are of concern. Should Tanzania and Zambia restrict grain exports to structurally-deficit neighboring countries in an effort to protect their domestic supplies, maize grain availability will be lower than normal in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) Haut Katanga province, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique.

Livestock conditions and agricultural labor opportunities have also been negatively affected by the poor 2018/19 seasonal performance. Pasture conditions and water availability for livestock are below average in many areas, including parts of Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, Zambia, and Botswana, where drought-related livestock diseases and deaths have already been reported. Livestock body conditions are unlikely to improve in drought-affected areas until the start of the 2019/20 rainy season, driving lower livestock prices through much of 2019, and atypically high livestock deaths are possible. In central Mozambique, it is reported that many impacted households lost their livestock in the floods and no longer have access to this source of income. Overall, poor households are expected to have below-average income through at least late 2019 when agricultural labor for the 2019/20 season will be available and the next rainy season drives livestock improvements.

As a result, atypically high levels of acute food insecurity are anticipated across the region, with the highest concern in Zimbabwe, central and southern Mozambique, southern Zambia, and parts of Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Angola. Additionally, FEWS NET anticipates the 2019/20 lean season will start atypically early in August and needs will be highest at the peak of the lean season in early 2020. Humanitarian actors and national governments should plan for higher than normal food assistance and livelihood support needs through at least early 2020.