Summary and implications

This report draws on the analysis of the FAO/WFP CFSAM (Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission) carried out from May 5 to May 17, 2006 in both northern and southern provinces of Angola. The agricultural season has been affected by highly variable rainfall patterns, characterized by intensive rain in November and December, an extended dry spell between December and March, followed by intensive rains again during March and April, and an early termination of rains in April. The season started well, with an increase in the cultivated area and extensive input support through the distribution of seed and fertilizers. The poor rainfall distribution has contributed to localized harvest losses of between 40 and 90 percent for maize and beans in some of the districts most affected by the adverse rainfall conditions this season. On an aggregate, national scale, the FAO/WFP CFSAM anticipates cereal losses of only 10 to 30 percent, and food availability is likely to be adequate when harvests of cassava, sweet potato, sorghum and millet are taken into account, together with the second season cultivation on the nacas and/or under irrigation. Livestock and fishing in Huila, Cunene and Namibe provinces will also minimize the negative impact of cereal production shortfalls. The upcoming report by the FAO/WFP CFSAM will quantify the overall harvest forecast and identify where production losses are expected.

The food security situation in the Central High Plateau (planalto) remains a major concern and does not look good compared to last year. Households in some districts of the planalto have consumed most of their food reserves and will have consumed most of the new harvest of maize and beans by September. Households most likely to suffer from food insecurity this season are: (i) households that do not expect to harvest drought resistant crops such as cassava, sorghum, millet and/or sweet potatoes; (ii) households that lack the capacity and/or the input support to cultivate on the nacas and/or under irrigation; (iii) households with few or no livestock; (iv) households with limited assets to dispose of for income; and (v) households with limited coping mechanisms. These 5 categories of households will include returning populations of external refugees. Districts affected by the adverse growing conditions this season are being supplied with locally produced food. Traders are facilitating the flow of food products between productive and non-productive areas. However, transportation of food is constrained by the poor quality of accesses roads. Maize flour from Namibia is already reaching some rural markets in Huila that cannot be adequately supplied with locally produced maize, due to the poor local harvests.

No emergency appeal has been made to date, and the FAO/WFP CFSAM is expected to conclude that there is no need for massive food aid programs. The government has provided funds to the MINARS (Ministério de Assistência e Reinservação Social) for food aid and has, through the MINADER (Ministério de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural), embarked on a number of actions to help smallholders to produce during the winter period. Food aid support from WFP is limited to school feeding, hospitals, nutrition centers and refugees. However, any further reduction in food aid at this time, given the poor overall harvest expected, would constitute an increased risk factor for the most vulnerable households.

Aside from limited and well targeted food aid, the following longer-term interventions can be applied in order to improve the food security situation: (i) improve food security assessments by calibrating remotely sensed rainfall estimates against rain-gauge measurements on the ground, monitoring early warning indicators, performing vulnerability analyses and characterizing smallholder production systems; (ii) prepare, design and implement emergency programs directed at most vulnerable households; and (iii) accelerate development programs for more permanent mitigation of structural and chronic food insecurity.

Timeline of current events

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<tr>
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<td>Average duration of food</td>
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<td>AUG</td>
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<td>FEB</td>
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<td>MAR</td>
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<td>APR</td>
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<td>MAY</td>
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Summary and timeline

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Season performance

Normally, September to May rainfall varies from about 500mm in the coast and south of Angola, to 1,000-1,500mm in the centre and over 1,500mm in the north of the country. However, 2005/06 has been characterized by an abnormal rainfall pattern that included: (i) intensive rainfall during the start of season; (ii) an extended dry spell lasting more than eight weeks between November and March; (iii) another period of intensive rainfall between March and April; and (iv) an early start of the dry period in April instead of May. This abnormal rainfall pattern was more severe over the coastal province of Kwanza Sul, the central provinces of Benguela and Huambo, and the southern provinces of Huila and Namibe. Local observations of climate conditions suggest that the 2005/06 rainfall season can only be compared to that observed during 1986/87. However, the majority of stakeholders considers the situation to be cyclical and expected periodically. Some smallholders also reported outbreaks of pests (caterpillar and beetle) and crop diseases that will also affect yields during the 2005/06 agricultural season.

The abnormal rainfall patterns during the 2005/06 season can be detected in the remote sensing image (Figure 2) which compares the current season with water requirements for a normal season. The image suggests that the north-west coast and the central regions of Angola received below average rainfall. However, it is important to point out that, although the imagery can demonstrate the pattern, remote sensing information in Angola can also overestimate rainfall, and hence, there is a need to calibrate remote sensing estimates against rain gauge measurements.

Production outlook

Angolan smallholders practice a mixed cropping system of mostly rain-fed agriculture. Cassava is the most important crop in the north; maize is the most important in the center, and sorghum and millet together comprise the key crops of the south. Various types of beans are also cultivated. By the time of the May field assessment, some smallholders had already harvested their maize and beans, while others were waiting for the maize to dry before it could be harvested in June. Cassava, sorghum and millet were still in their vegetative phases.

GSA (Gabinete de Segurança Alimentar), with the support of FAO, has helped IDA (Institute de Desenvolvimento Rural) staff to assess the harvest. However, much still needs to be done before IDA staff provide reliable information on timely basis. For example, there is a need to (i) increase the number of staff to cover enough samples, (ii) provide transportation, scales and tape measures to field staff; (iii) motivate staff, mainly with incentives, to perform their work on timely manner; and (iv) build the system’s capacity for the timely transfer of information to Luanda for processing and analysis. More data is needed for the agricultural assessment and to facilitate harvest estimates. Therefore, this report uses information about the season from numerous stakeholders, including government reports, farmers and key informants. The soon to be released FAO/WFP CFSAM will contain a harvest estimate based on a number of additional factors, including the number of farming households, area cultivated, yield estimates and post harvest losses.

Overall, there was an increase in cultivated area during the 2005/06 agricultural season, as households expanded the area they would cultivate and returning refugees added to the pool of available labor. However, diarrhea and malaria were the main constraints that limited the utilization of available labor. In addition, the war that affected Angola in the 1980s and 90s also wiped out a large number of animals that was used for traction. Cattle reconstitution programs together with programs for the promotion of animal traction are expected to increase further the size of fields that households can cultivate.

The 2005/06 agricultural season was also characterized by an increase in the distribution of inputs to smallholders. The government program distributed about 20-25kg of seeds per farmer to more than a million of smallholders organized in associations. FAO, in
collaboration with UNHCR, IDA and MINARS, has also distributed about 12,000 farm kits to returnees and ex-soldiers. NGOs such as CARITAS in Namibe, World Vision, CARE and others have also been actively involved in the distribution of inputs to boost agricultural production. Some commercial banks such as Banco Sol and BPC have been involved in input-credit scheme that ranged between US$ 100 and US$ 2,000/farmer. In addition, emerging private providers have also started marketing inputs to smallholders.

Despite the formidable efforts to increase acreage planted and yields through input supply, there are other improvements that must be made. In some situations, seeds were provided late and were of poor quality. This forced smallholders to plant late and/or to replant after waiting in vain for the germination of poor quality seed. Those that planted late in November were much more seriously affected by the rainfall variability than those that planted early in October. Many smallholders also did not plant drought resistant crops such as cassava, sweet potato, sorghum and millet as they normally would in response to the irregular season, due to the lack of quality seeds. Smallholders have particularly stressed their concern about the inaccessibility of seeds to cultivate during the winter period and to alleviate the effects of abnormal rainfall patterns that affected first season rain-fed production.

Because of their low fertility, the soils in the majority of highland ferralsols in central Angola require additional inputs to achieve meaningful maize yields of at least 2 MT/ha. In spite of the abnormal rainfall that has affected the harvests of the first and second cropping seasons, households could still produce in nacas or under irrigation. However, some smallholders may miss the opportunity to cultivate during the winter period due to weak support for small-scale irrigation. Overall, the current food insecurity situation can be minimized by supporting smallholders with the following: (i) timely provision of quality seed for second season cropping; (ii) distribution of agrochemicals using market based mechanisms; (iii) support for small-scale irrigation schemes; and (iv) promotion of agricultural activities in nacas.

The highly variable rainfall during the 2005/06 season will result in below average yields in central and southern Angola. Maize and beans, the main crops of the zone, are more affected than cassava, sorghum and millet. The variable rainfall pattern has affected maize and bean yields in the following ways: (i) the intensive rains in November damaged crops during the flowering stage and caused water logging and nutrient leaching; (ii) the extended “small” dry spell (pequeno cacimbo) occurred as maize was tasseling; (iii) the extended small dry period spell beyond February delayed the second phase planting; (iv) the intense rains during the end of March and the beginning of April severely affected the second season planting by causing water logging and nutrient leaching; and (v) the early end to the rains in April affected some maize crops that were successfully planted during the second planting. During the May field visit in central and southern Angola, the status of the second-season maize crop provided little prospect for a good harvest. In the districts most affected by the variable rainfall patterns, an overall loss of 65% is expected for first season maize and beans. For example, compared to the regional average for maize productivity of 500 kg/ha, farmers in Tchinjenji reported a harvest of 50 kg/ha while farmers in Ukuma reported a harvest of 250 kg/ha for maize. Although yields are worse than they were last year, smallholders and stakeholders reckon that there production has been poor for the last three years due to structural problems related to rainfall variability. The last good harvest that smallholders remember was in 2003.

Nevertheless, fields planted with drought resistant crops of cassava, sorghum, millet and sweet potato have moderate harvest prospect. Millet production in the semi-arid Cunene Province has not been significantly affected by the variable rainfall. Smallholders with access to nacas and irrigation technology still have time left to cultivate during the winter period. By taking the above into consideration, the FAO/WFP CPSAM estimates a national drop in cereal production of about 10-30 percent (according to preliminary information received during the debrief).

**Livestock and Fishing**

Livestock production and fishing can minimize the food security effects of abnormal rainfall, given their importance as source of protein and of income through sales of livestock, meat and traction services. Livestock production increases in importance as one moves from the center, to the coastal and southern parts of Angola. Interestingly, the majority of districts adversely affected by variable rainfall conditions this season are potentially good livestock producing areas. However, only a small percentage (≤19 percent) of households in these districts own large livestock (cattle). Livestock reconstitution programs should therefore be seen as a high return intervention for improving the food security situation of rural households.

The extended dry spell forced an early start of the transhumance in December and January from southern districts of Namibe, Cunene and Huila to the north and east. Normally transhumance starts in August when rivers and ponds (chimpancas) start to dry out in the southern and coastal areas of Angola. Nevertheless, the rains that fell in March and April provided enough water for drinking and growth of grass for pasture. No major disease outbreak has been reported. However, the low vaccination coverage rate (about 30 percent) would be too small to prevent animal death should there be a disease outbreak. During the field assessment in May, most livestock appeared to be in good condition.

The government and NGOs have been involved in livestock reconstitution programs. These programs are aimed at income generation through expanded marketing of animals, meat or animal traction services. While animal densities are still low compared to other Southern African countries, livestock numbers have been on the rise. Smallholders generally have adequate knowledge of a proper commercial off-take rate to insure continued sustainable growth in livestock numbers.
Fishing is also an important food and income source for households near the coast, such as in Benguela, Namibe and Kwanza Sul. Inland, fresh water fishing is also an important activity in eastern provinces of Moxico and Kuando Kubango. CARITAS’ experience in supporting fishing activities in Namibe in favor of smallholders needs to be incorporated into expansion strategies. Fish farming activities should also be considered as a key intervention for improving household food security.

**Food security and nutrition**

**Current Food Security**

Food security is more precarious than it was this time in 2004/05, particularly in the Central High Plateau. Usually, households are food secure during May. This year, households have been relying on relatively small harvest to feed themselves. However, households in districts with the poorest production, those shown in Figure 3, have already consumed most of their food reserves and a large proportion of the recent harvests of maize and beans. There is a concern that people in these districts may become food insecure.

Many households are resorting to traditional coping mechanisms to mitigate their current food insecurity. The sale of charcoal (AKZ 400/bag) and provision of farm and off-farm labor (AKZ 150/day) are the two most common coping mechanisms observed during the field visit. Some households in Chinjenji and Ukuma in Huambo have started adjusting their diet by eating low quality foods such as banana flour, and by reducing the number of daily meals. Some households have also reported the use of theft as a coping mechanism. It is important to stress that only a small proportion of households had the capacity to use reliable coping strategies. In addition, Angolan rural households have a very low asset base, so sale of assets for cash in order to buy food is usually not an option.

**Food Security Implications for the Next Year**

Household food security in the coming months of the hunger season will be less favorable compared to last year. Households most likely to suffer from food insecurity this season are: (i) households that do not expect to harvest drought resistant crops such as cassava, sorghum, millet and sweet potatoes; (ii) households that do not have the capacity and/or the input support to cultivate on the nacas and/or under irrigation; (iii) households with few or no livestock; (iv) households with limited saleable assets to generate income; and (v) households with limited coping mechanisms.

The most vulnerable households are likely to refugee returning from elsewhere, mainly those now located in central Angola. Some returnees, mainly spontaneous returnees, started the 2005/06 agricultural season with difficulties, due to the lack of seeds and implements. In addition, returnees with less than two prior harvests behind them have accumulated little to start building up their assets. The expected returnees in 2006/07, to be settled in some districts already affected by poor harvests, are potentially a high risk group. Therefore, UNHCR, WFP and MINARS food aid support to returnees should be continued to help returnees establish viable livelihoods.

The joint ministerial committees reported that about 300 000 households were to face a situation of food insecurity in the central and southern provinces of Angola. However, with possible harvest of cassava, sorghum, millet and sweet potato, cultivation on nacas and under irrigation, healthy livestock and the possible use of positive coping mechanisms, not all of the 300,000 households will become food insecure. The FAO/WFP CFSAM will soon provide more specific numbers of the food insecure households.

Households in the most vulnerable districts would have used most of their food reserves by September 2006. After September, they will turn to coping strategies until March 2007, when they will harvest fresh produce from fields planted in the first season. Households in less affected districts will use most of their food reserves by the end of December. The reduced food availability, together with the lack of potable water from September, the emergence of diarrhea and malaria during the onset of rains in September and October, and the limited available health assistance in rural areas could increase the cases of malnourished children, with subsequent increase in mortality. This requires close monitoring.
Prices and flow of food products

People in the more food insecure communities will depend on the markets as source of food. During the May field visit, some people were already buying food in the local market, using income from the sale of charcoal. Village markets are being supplied with locally produced food. There is also some trade going on between villages and cities, with traders playing a key role between producers and consumers. However, poor accesses roads will limit the flow of food from surplus districts to communities where there is scarcity. Markets from Huila are also being supplied with maize flour imported from Namibia.

The May 2006 price for maize (KZ20/kg) in Huambo City was lower than the May 2005 maize price (AKZ 27/kg). Traders paid a farm gate price of between AKZ 15/kg and AKZ 17/kg. However, in the most of the more food insecure communities of Huambo, Huila and Benguela provinces, the price of maize grain was about AKZ 50/kg. These prices were similar to prices last year at this time. However, the actual market price did not yet reflect the expected reduction in maize harvest this year for several reasons: (i) cash-strapped households often rush to the market to sell their products to respond to pressing needs even if they did not produce enough; (ii) demand did not increase possibly because households have limited cash to buy food; and (iii) substitute products such as imported rice and pasta are available in markets.

During February, livestock farmers were concerned about the effect of drought on their livestock. The livestock price this month was 9 percent lower than it was at this time last year. However, the May 2006 cattle average price of AKZ 29,333 was 14 percent higher than the average price (AKZ 25,333) for the same period in 2005. This increase in price suggests that there was no negative change in livestock/cereals terms of trade and no distress selling as the result of the poor rainfall season. Rising demand for cattle and meat products in Huila and Huambo has actually contributed to a price increase.

Government appeal and interventions taken

The government has not made an official appeal for assistance to the international community. However, this may become necessary, in response to the food insecurity that could affect households in Benguela, Huambo and Huila. The government has, however, invited the FAO/WFP to observe whether there is a need for any emergency intervention that will require government and partner involvement. Preliminary findings of the FAO/WFP CFSAM suggest that there is no need for a massive food aid programs. FAO/WFP is however recommending longer term development interventions to help rural households overcome structural risks and poverty-related chronic food insecurity.

The government has disbursed more than US$25 million to tackle the localized food insecurity caused by the abnormal rainfall patterns. MINARS has received the majority of funds (80 percent) to provide food aid and other emergency support while MINADER has received the balance to promote off-season cropping in nacas and/or under irrigation during the winter period. Smallholders are being supplied with seeds for maize, beans, sweet and Irish potatoes, and vegetables. The government is also encouraging commercial farmers to cultivate during the winter period to increase the supply of farm food products to local markets.

Overall, WFP has reduced their activities in the provision of food aid. The WFP however is still providing food for school feeding, hospitals for HIV/AIDS and TB patients and child nutrition centers. UNHCR, WFP and MINARS have also continued to provide food aid to returnees. Any further reduction in food aid this season could constitute a risk factor for those households that were not able to plant drought resistant crops, those with no possibility to cultivate in nacas or off-season irrigation, and those households with no livestock, with insignificant assets and inefficient coping mechanisms. A GSA vulnerability study in Huambo, to be published soon, will reveal the characteristics, the location, and number of households most at risk. A more extensive assessment covering the central provinces will be required.

Recommendations

Improving food security in Angola requires interventions beyond food aid that assist recovery and longer term agriculture development with poverty reduction. FEWS NET recommends actions that fall into three broad categories: (i) improving food security assessments including calibration of remote sensing data for Angola, market information for early warning, and strengthening agricultural statistics and vulnerability assessments; (ii) designing and implementing emergency programs targeted at the most vulnerable households; and (iii) designing poverty reducing rural development programs for the long term mitigation of food insecurity. While recognizing that these actions go beyond the immediate needs for response to the current season, they will be essential in the future for Angola to avoid periodic food security crises due to climate variability.

Improving food security assessments

Four key interventions are required to improve food security assessments:

(i) Calibrate remotely sensed rainfall data against rain-gauge measurements. USGS, INAMET, Agromet (from the MINADER, Faculty of Agronomy, or the Agronomic Research Institute (IIA)) should collaborate to recalibrate RFE (rainfall estimate) using remote sensing and to strengthen remote sensing capacities.
(ii) Monthly collection of early warning information to alert decision-makers in a more timely way about the food security situation. GSA will need support to provide current and forecast information in this regard.

(iii) Strengthen capacities to conduct annual vulnerability assessments to identify the most vulnerable populations, their location, their numbers, and their needs. WFP support to GSA to establish a VAC with the capacity of implementing annual vulnerability assessment should be enhanced.

(iv) Organize agricultural surveys every three years to collect basic agricultural data such as number of producers, extent of cultivated areas, yields, number of livestock per households and number of tree crops. Other parameters required to estimate production, harvest, losses, consumptions and sales should also be considered. The National Institute of Statistics, Agronomic Research Institute, the Veterinary Research Institute and the Directorate of Planning of MINADER need to collaborate to perform surveys that will provide updated and reliable statistics about Angolan agriculture.

Prepare, design and implement emergency programs that target the most vulnerable households

The following are the three key interventions needed to support the emergency food/cash aid programs: (i) predict, based on early warning information and vulnerability assessment, the food and cash assistance needed for the most vulnerable populations; (ii) develop food and cash reserves based on predicted shortfalls and food access gaps; and (iii) continued improvement of the MINARS and Civil Protection Services’ readiness in the provision of emergency programs to the vulnerable populations. Institutions such as FEWS NET, WFP, Medecin Sans Frontieres, IRC and the like can assist GSA, MINARS and the Civil Protection Services in the prediction of the food and cash needs, establishment of food and cash reserves, and improvement in the provision of emergency services.

Design well-tailored development programs for long term mitigation of food insecurity

The current food insecurity situation in central and southern Angola is determined by natural causes that require a very organized livelihood system to help households to enlarge livelihood options under existing rainfall and soil conditions. Therefore, the situation is more of a priority for development interventions, as opposed to emergency ones. Development interventions can originate from activities in various sectors including agriculture, ecotourism, small business development and employment generation. The suggestions below only consider some of the higher priority agricultural based interventions.

Introduction of drought resistant crops, perennial crops and livestock

(i) Expand cultivation of drought resistant crops into central Angola, including cassava from the north and sorghum and millet from the south.

(ii) Introduce and expand the Vitamin A rich sweet potato into all the regions;

(iii) Invest in perennial cash crops with deep rooting system such as olive trees in the southern coast (Namibe), walnut trees in the center (e.g., Huila, Huambo), cashew trees in the northern coast, and cocoa, coffee, macadamia or forestry trees in the north and central region. These crops can still produce under abnormal rainfall conditions and ensure income for extended period of time; and

(iv) Introduce/expand the production of livestock, including goats, sheep, cattle and pigs to provide a secure source of protein and income.

Improve the provision of agricultural services

(i) Develop small-scale irrigation schemes that can be managed at the village or association level.

(ii) Facilitate the provision of agricultural mechanization services to improve land preparation and cultivation by smallholders;

(iii) Facilitate the affordable commercial marketing of seed, fertilizers and pesticides; and

(iv) Facilitate credit services to help smallholders have access to services and inputs.

Provide technical assistance to improve production, harvest and storage of agricultural products

(i) Introduce early planting and early weeding of crops;

(ii) Promote the application of organic and/or conservation farming to build soil fertility and protect plants;

(iii) Expand integrated cropping with livestock and/or fish farming production to improve the efficiency of utilization of inputs and increase output;

(iv) Improve the on-farm storage of smallholders’ products, and reduce post harvest losses.

Processing

Facilitate greater commercial processing for potential cash crops such as cassava, olives, walnut, cashew nut, cocoa, and macadamia or forestry species. MINADER, the Ministry of Industry and appropriate UN, donors and NGOs can collaborate in the development of the agro-industry for smallholders produced products, where value added could be realized at the household level.

Marketing/cash crops

Develop agricultural markets to facilitate the expanded marketing of smallholders’ farm output through producer groups and agricultural outgrower companies that would assemble, add value and market smallholder based products in local, regional and international markets.