

MOZAMBIQUE Food Security Outlook Update

March 2012

Rainfall deficits continue in the central and southern areas

Key Messages

- The most likely scenario described in the FEWS NET February Outlook report is still valid, particularly for the drought scenario. The persistent and significant rainfall deficits in parts of the central zone and much of the southern zone have led to below-average crop yields during the 2011/12 cropping season. However, the majority of households, including those in drought-affected areas, are generally food secure (IPC Phase 1).
- According to the February assessment by the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition Vulnerability Assessment Group (SETSAN/GAV), an estimated 146,500 people, most of whom are located in Zambézia and Tete provinces, will require humanitarian assistance, until the next second season harvest in July/August 2012, due to recent shocks including cyclones/storms, floods and/or dry spells.
- As the country enters the harvest period, increased crop availability in local markets has started pushing prices down in some monitored markets, especially for the readily available crops such as maize. In most markets, monthly maize prices from January to February have remained unchanged or decreased following the seasonal trend due to the beginning of harvests. From now to June, further decreases are expected as the harvest period sets in throughout the country.

Updated food security outlook through June 2012

Persistent and significant rainfall deficits in parts of the central zone and much of the southern zone have led to below-average crop yields during the 2011/12 cropping season. The affected areas include the southern Tete province, central and southern parts of Sofala province, the southern and northern parts of Manica province, the interior semi-arid areas of Inhambane and Gaza provinces and parts of Maputo province. However, even in these areas, households are generally food secure as most are consuming remains from the previous season's harvest as well as this season's fresh crops from the harvest, which recently started. The food now becoming available is a relief, especially in places badly hit by these year's shocks including cyclones, floods and/or dry spells. In Figure 1, Massangena and Chigubo districts are marked as Phase 2, stressed acute food insecurity conditions, as result of previous assessments from SETSAN/GAV where the number of people in those conditions exceeded 20 percent of total district population and expected to last until March 2012.

The 2011/12 rainfall season was influenced by a weak to moderate La Niña

Figure 1. Most likely food security scenario, March 2012

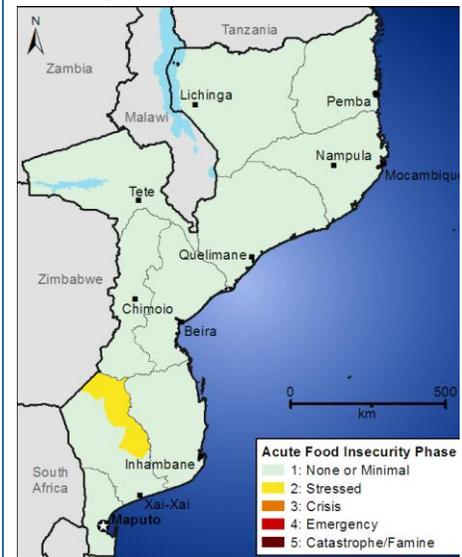
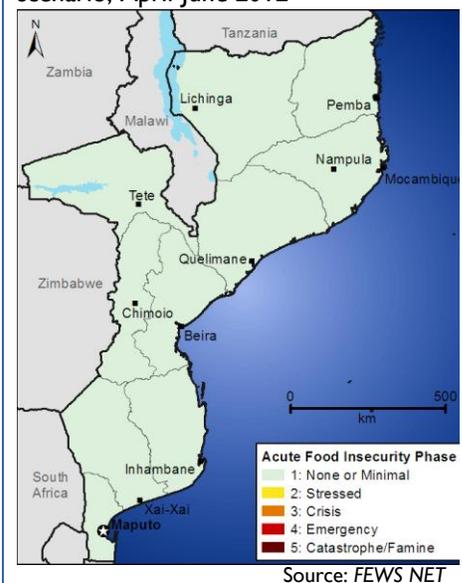


Figure 2. Most likely food security scenario, April-June 2012



For more information on the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Scale, please see:

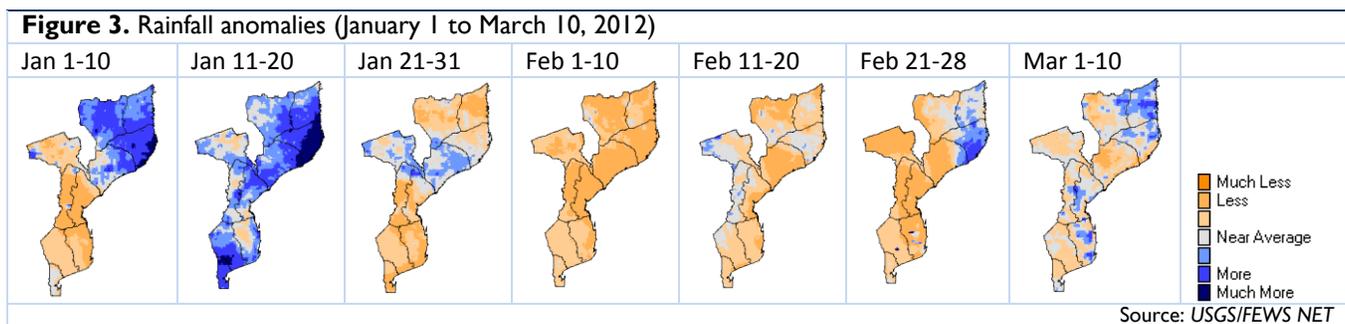
www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

This report provides an update to the February 2012 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook report which estimated food security conditions in Mozambique through June 2012. The next Outlook report will be released in April and will cover the April through September 2012 period.

event. Typically during La Niña events the southeastern region of Africa experiences wetter than normal conditions. This prompted the assumption that there would be a high probability for the occurrence of moderate to severe floods, especially from January to March. Nevertheless, the 2011/12 rainfall season in Mozambique has been unusual, with cyclone and floods in parts of the country and long mid-season dryness in other parts of the country. Rainfall has been irregular and below normal across most of the country during the first half of the season (October-December 2011), and from January the situation was aggravated by a number of shocks which have disrupted livelihoods. Very recently, in late February, tropical cyclone “Irina” has affected the coastal areas of Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo with strong winds and heavy rains.

In March food assistance for vulnerable households typically comes to an end. This year, however, emergency assistance is expected to continue until May for households affected by the recent floods and cyclones. According to the February rapid food security assessment by the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition Vulnerability Assessment Group (SETSAN/GAV), due to recent shocks including a prolonged dryness, an estimated 146,500 people will require humanitarian assistance until the next harvest estimated to take place in July/August 2012. A countrywide vulnerability assessment planned for May 2012 will determine the type and level of needs, as well as the exact duration of interventions.

Prolonged dry spells since January appear to be the most worrisome hazard for the scenario period. The persistence of dry spells for an extended period of time may lead to drought. Drought is a slow-onset and often protracted event. It may take six or more months before the effects are clearly visible, and then it may continue for a year or more. In most southern areas, riverine planting reduces dependence on rainfall, and small and large-scale irrigation schemes along the river also help ameliorate the effects of regular droughts. However, for most poor and very poor households, who heavily depend on rainfall for cropping, and those living in the semi-arid and arid areas, the effects of drought on their livelihoods are dire given their limited options to generate income. These households will potentially exhaust their food reserves in June, when they would normally last until the onset of the lean season in October. From July, these households are expected to start coping with the effects of the rainfall deficits through typical coping strategies, including intensification of sales of natural products such as grass, building poles, and firewood; production and sale of charcoal, sales of poultry, traditionally distilled alcohol, and other goods/craft. Casual labor especially in land preparation and planting for more resourced households will also play an important role. In general, for the areas where rainfall deficits have caused reduced crop yields, the second season harvest (expected in July/August) will be crucial to compensate for food deficits caused by lower food availability from the main cropping season and lack of income.



The second cropping season depends mostly on residual moisture and riverine planting in lowlands. In some areas in the south and central parts of the country where crops were lost due to flooding in January, the water recession-dependent agriculture could still yield good results. Improvement in the rainfall occurred in parts of central and southern zones in early March (Figure 3). Rains in the remainder of the season will help the survival of new planting and will supply adequate moisture for the upcoming second season planting (now through May/June).

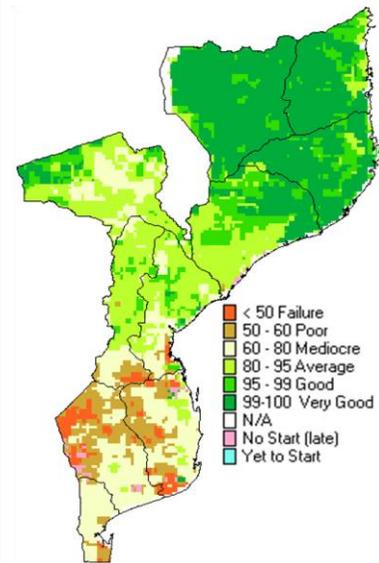
The Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI) updated to March 10, 2012 (Figure 4) suggests that the mid-season dryness that is currently affecting the southern and central zones of Mozambique and other parts of southern Africa is resulting in below-average crop yields. According to the dekadal (every 10 days) bulletin from the Crops and Early Warning Unit from the Ministry of Agriculture issued on March 13, crops were at vegetative and maturation stages and performing well in the northern zone; maturation and harvesting stages and performing well in the plateaus; but average to mediocre in the semi-arid areas in the central zone. In the southern zone of the country most crops are in the harvesting stage. Given that the northern zone, the most productive area of the country, is performing above average, prospects for this cropping season indicate a near-average to above-average performance.

According to the update of the seasonal forecast issued by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Climate Service Center (CSC), the March through May 2012 rainfall projections for most of Southern Africa, gives a high likelihood for the occurrence of normal to above-normal rains in northern Mozambique and near-normal to below-normal rains for the remainder of the country. However, it should be noted that over this period the seasonal pattern shows a diminishing trend in the amount of rainfall.

As the country enters the harvest period, increased crop availability in local markets has started pushing prices down in some monitored markets, especially for the readily available crops such as maize. In most markets monthly maize prices from January to February have remained unchanged or decreased following the seasonal trend due to the beginning of harvests. For instance in Tete (central zone) maize prices have decreased by 10 percent, in Maputo and Chokwe (southern zone) the prices have remained unchanged. From now to June, further decreases are expected as the harvest period sets in throughout the country.

The increase in food availability from the 2011/12 cropping season combined with the last season's stocks will push prices down according to the seasonal trend. However, depending on the timing of food availability from the current season, drop in prices may delay in some cases, especially where planting was tardy. In general, from April all prices are expected to be decreasing except in the areas severely affected by the recent shocks, temporarily abnormal rising in prices of staple foods may occur.

Figure 4. Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI) showing maize status, March 10, 2012

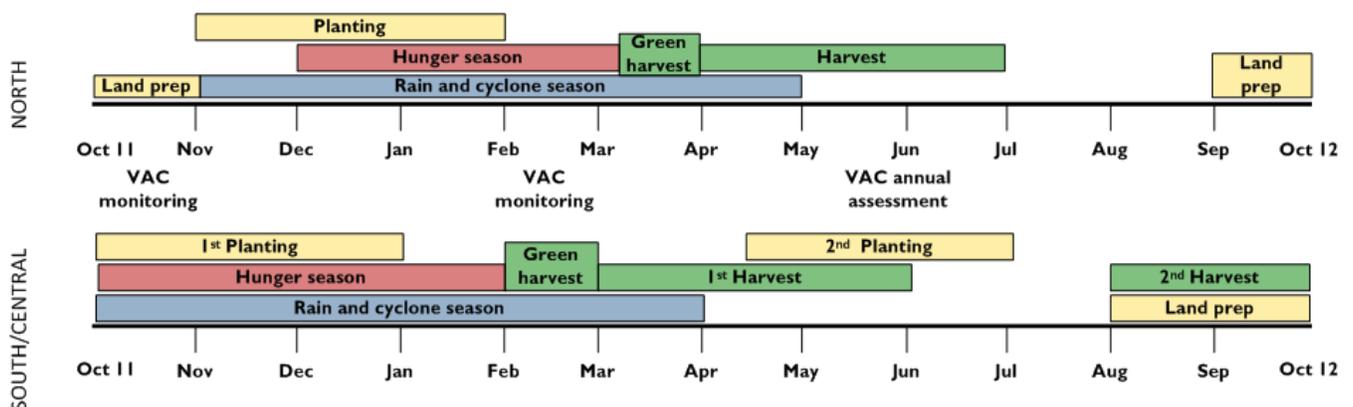


Source: FEWS NET

Based on historical events and the updated rainfall forecast, the risk of floods is now minimal for the remainder of the rainfall season until April. However, localized extreme weather events such as heavy rains or minor storms/depressions are still possible. Although the probability for occurrence of more cyclonic systems has diminished, until April the coastal districts of Mozambique between Nampula and Inhambane provinces are still under threat. Tropical depressions, storms or even cyclones with high winds, heavy rains, and storm surges on the coast are still possible and their effects may cause potential loss of life and damage to crops and trees, property, communications, and infrastructure depending on their intensity.

March is typically the period that marks the effective onset of harvests in Mozambique especially in south. At this period of the season, food availability increases substantially and markets are supplied by the ongoing harvesting. Assuming that the assumptions made previously remain unchanged, and that the probability of severe climate events diminish, it is expected that the majority of households in the country will be classified as IPC Phase 1 from April to June.

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: FEWS NET