KEY MESSAGES

- Most of Lesotho is currently classified as Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and as the ongoing lean season peaks, the number of people facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes is increasing. This period is even more severe this year due to the compounding effects of two consecutive poor harvests. Food consumption gaps are expected to persist among poor and very poor households until the onset of harvests in May 2020, although improvements may be limited by expected poor agricultural production.

- Agriculture activity has increased slightly due to increased rainfall across much of Lesotho in November and December. Although late in some areas, farmers have been planting in order to catch up with the season. This is driving increases in agricultural labor opportunities for very poor and poor households, which remain below typical levels. Labor wage rates are also lower than usual, limiting income for households who depend on these activities during the lean season.

- Maize grain prices have been generally stable in months. Maize grain prices in Maseru market have been stable since May although there was a 4% jump from September to October 2019. Markets are functioning normally with adequate stocks supplied from South Africa.

**ZONE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT ANOMALIES</th>
<th>PROJECTED ANOMALIES</th>
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<td>Nationalwide but with more intensity in Leribe, Berea, Quthing and a few areas bordering Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka</td>
<td>Late start of season and below average cumulative rainfall</td>
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<td>Below-average incomes</td>
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<td>Below-average agriculture labor opportunities and wage rates</td>
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**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2020**

The start of 2019/20 rainfall season was poor in Lesotho. The worst affected districts are Leribe, Berea, Quthing and a few areas bordering Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka, where rainfall was late by more than 40 days. For other parts of Lesotho, rainfall was late by about 20 days. A late start of rainfall season has more negative impacts in the Mountains (Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka) since these areas typically receive first rains in October and plant earlier than the rest of Lesotho. In addition, a late start of more than 40 days for Leribe is severe considering that Leribe is one of the top three high producing districts in Lesotho. Apart from a late start of season, cumulative rainfall to date has been below average. CHIRPS Preliminary rainfall data for October 1-December 15, 2019 indicate that rainfall across most of Lesotho has been 55 to 70% of normal rainfall.
As a result of a poor rainfall season described above, agriculture activities are highly likely be affected this year. Although recent rainfall has led to an increase in agricultural activities, labor opportunities have increased compared to previous months but remain below typical levels. Due to low purchasing power by middle and better off households who provide most labor opportunities, wage rates are also below average. This will continue to negatively affect poor households’ access to income until April or May 2020. In-kind payments are also below average and will remain lower than normal throughout the lean season, as households have run out of stocks from the previous harvest. As harvests are likely to be delayed due to the poor start of season, household consumption from green harvests, which typically starts around the end of February into March, will also likely be delayed. This will likely lead to an extended lean season, as consumption of green crops tends to improve food consumption at the end of the lean season. As harvests get fully underway by April/May, food consumption is expected to improve further. However, these improvements may be short-lived, as 2020 harvests are anticipated to be below average.

Currently, many households are relying on remittances from South Africa. Remittances are an important, stable source of income but also a coping strategy for the majority and will likely remain the main livelihood source throughout the lean season. However, some very poor households do not have any members across the border who can send money back home. For other households, some household members who were seasonally migrating for labor have since returned to work on their fields as the agriculture season started, which limits remittance flows. Off-farm labor opportunities have seasonally declined as households switch to agriculture-related activities. This is reducing options for accessing income for many households. As a result, it is expected that access to income will remain below average through May 2020, thereby negatively affecting purchasing power and worsening food insecurity.

Markets remain well stocked, thus providing sufficient quantities of staple and non-staple foods. Although local maize is still available on the markets, most staple foods supplying the markets are from South Africa. Typically, Lesotho does not experience supply problems due to consistent supplies from South Africa. Although maize grain prices from Maseru market showed a 4% jump from September to October 2019, prices have been generally stable since May 2019. Although prices have been generally stable, a combination of below-average incomes, poor access to in-kind foods from labor, and expected delays in harvests will likely result in households remaining in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through April 2020. Food security outcomes are expected to improve temporarily to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) for most of Lesotho due to harvests starting in May 2010.

ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING
In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. Learn more here.