Stressed food insecurity in localized areas persists as maize prices increase across the country

KEY MESSAGES

• Poor households in areas where the harvest was affected by flooding, prolonged dry spells, and early cessation of rainfall are expected to run out of their food stocks by the end of August. Households in these localized areas in the northern, central, and southern regions of the country are currently facing Stressed acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 2) outcomes.

• National staple maize prices have started rising seasonally. Between June and July 2013 average prices increased by approximately 14 percent, which is higher than the average month-to-month increases during this period.

• According to the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) annual food security assessment report, a projected 1.5 million people will face food consumption deficits from around October 2013 to March 2014. While this is lower than the 2 million people identified as at risk of food insecurity last year, this figure is 57 percent above the five-year average. The MVAC has recommended a phased government-led response starting in October and ending in March. Response planning is underway but it is unclear if the response programming will start by October.

CURRENT SITUATION

• During the staple maize marketing months of July to September, most of the households in the country normally consume food from own production. However, during the main cropping season key food crop harvests in localized areas were reduced because of localized flooding, prolonged dry spells, and early cessation of rainfall during the 2012/2013 rainfall season. The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) has projected that about 9.5 percent of the national population (approximately 1.5 million people) in 21 of the 28 districts in Malawi are projected to face food deficits between October 2013 and March 2014. MVAC’s current projected population at risk of food insecurity is 25 percent less that last year’s projected food insecure population, but 57 percent above the five-year average.

• The MVAC findings from their June 2013 Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) indicate that household food access is most constrained in the southern region (Nsanje, Machinga, and Mangochi districts), where the Coping Strategy Index (CSI) was the highest in the nation. CSI is a tool for rapidly measuring food security by assessing household consumption behaviour when households cannot access enough food, or do not have enough money to purchase food. The higher the CSI score is, the higher the stress on households’ access to food. Salima district, located in the central region, recorded the highest CSI across all districts.
• The Humanitarian Response Sub-Committee (HRSC) of Food and Nutrition Security Joint Task Force (FNSJTF) has started looking at possible response options for the projected population that will face food consumption deficits. The MVAC has also conducted a market assessment to inform the response options for the HRSC. The Strategic Grain Reserves (SGR) does not have adequate maize grain stocks to meet the levels of food required for this response. By mid-August less than 20,000 MT had been restocked in the SGR. The World Food Program (WFP) has already received about 30 percent of the funding needed to implement the 2013/14 response program. These current funding levels are only sufficient for a partial start of the response in the worst affected areas. These latest developments suggest humanitarian response is likely but it still unclear if the interventions will start by October 2013, as recommended by the MVAC report. In the recent past a combination of direct food distribution and cash transfers have been used in government-led humanitarian assistance interventions.

• Average national maize prices in July 2013 were 152 percent above the five-year average for July. The month-to-month price increase from June to July was 14 percent this year compared to 5 percent on average. This higher than normal maize price increase is mainly attributed to the lingering effects of last year’s currency devaluation and subsequent depreciation (which has increased costs associated with imported inputs), the transfer of generally higher farmer production costs to the consumer, high demand this year due to production shortfalls in surplus areas in the north and central region, compounded with the lingering effects of last year’s production shortfalls in the south.

• The informal cross border trade (XBT) for July 2013 shows lower export and import quantities of maize grain when compared to the five-year average. As of July 2013, the cumulative import situation from April to July 2013 was at 68 percent of the five year average (15,339 MT compared to 22,570 MT) while the cumulative export situation from April to July 2013 was at only 20 percent of the five-year average (2,922 MT compared to 14,557 MT). This suggests that there is not much maize stock within the country in order to meet the national demand. The high demand of maize within Malawi means maize prices are likely to continue on the rising trend, making it more difficult for poor households to access food through markets.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The current situation has not affected the assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the period of July to December 2013. A full discussion of the scenario is available in the July 2013 Food Security Outlook.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH DECEMBER 2013

FEWS NET projects that due to the localized production shocks in surplus and deficit areas, reduced food consumption levels (as identified by the MVAC EFSA assessment), and high maize prices, means that poor households are likely to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in all the three regions of the country. The affected livelihood zones in southern Malawi are SLA³ (Mangochi district), MSH¹ (Balaka, Blantyre and Zomba districts), LSH¹ (Nsanje and Chikhwawa districts), PHA¹ (Phalombe, Machinga and part of Zomba districts) and RFT¹ (Mwanza and Neno districts). In central Malawi the affected livelihood zone is KAS¹ (Kasungu, Mchinji, Ntchisi and Dowa districts). In northern Malawi two livelihood zones are affected and these are MZS¹ (Mzimba district) and WRM¹ (Rumphi and Mzimba districts). During the October to December period the food security situation will worsen to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) when access to food becomes a major limiting factor and if humanitarian assistance has not started in MSH, KAS, MZS and WRM. This acute food insecurity outcome projection will be revised once the humanitarian interventions are confirmed and fully funded.

---

¹ See the 2007 Malawi Livelihood Zone Map for Southern Lakeshore (SLA), Middle Shire (MSH), Lower Shire (LSH), Phalombe Lake Chirwa Plan (PHA), Rift Valley (RFT), Kasungu-Lilongwe Plain (KAS), Mzimba Self Sufficient (MZS), Western Rumphi & Mumba (WRM): http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/MW_Livelihoods.pdf