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Southern Africa

Key Message Update

Further increase in staple food prices expected through the lean season

October 2018

Key Messages:

The lean season has started atypically early across large areas of Southern Africa due to the poor 2018 harvest from prolonged dry spells during the second half of the 2017/18 rainy season. Most poor households in affected areas, including parts of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Lesotho, are already experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Many households in conflict-affected parts of DRC are also in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). In the absence of humanitarian assistance, these outcomes will persist through January 2019, and more households are expected to face Crisis IPC (Phase 3) outcomes.

Due to limited staple supplies in some markets and earlier than normal demand for staple food purchases, prices continue to increase. Maize grain prices in parts of Malawi and northern parts of Mozambique are 11 percent and 32 percent above the five-year average, respectively. DRC, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho have also reported increases in maize grain prices. Staple food prices will likely continue to increase through the lean season when most households are expected to exhaust their harvest.

Households have started land preparation activities for the 2018/19 agriculture season. In a typical year, poor households earn income through land preparation activities to purchase food from markets. However, this year these opportunities are anticipated to be below average in most countries as better-off households were also affected by the poor harvest and subsequently face increased difficulty paying laborers. In addition, the forecast weak El Niño is expected to negatively impact the start of the season, lowering agriculture activities through the projection period. Overall, poor households will have lower than normal ability to purchase staple foods, and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected.

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