

Erratic rainfall in the south could significantly reduce yields

KEY MESSAGES

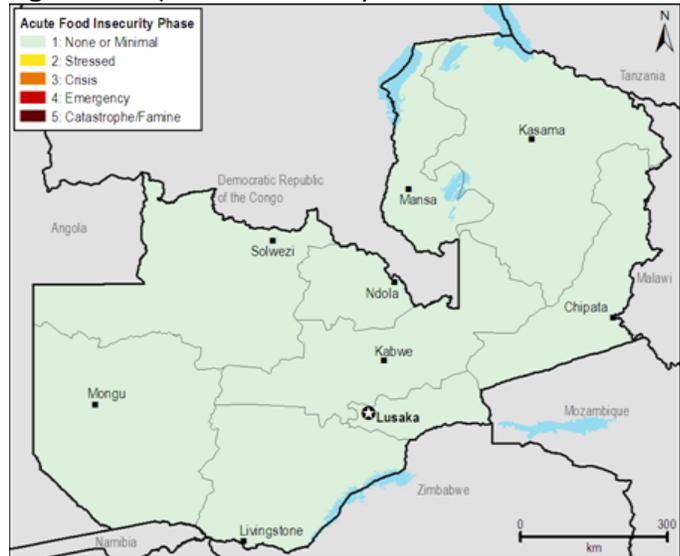
- Acute food insecurity remains Minimal (IPC Phase 1). Most households continue to depend on market purchases for their staple food and the situation is expected to remain stable through June.
- Although erratic rainfall in southern Zambia has affected crop conditions and is likely to reduce yields, the dryness has reduced the risk of flooding in areas in western and southern Zambia has reduced.

CURRENT SITUATION

In line with the outcomes projected in the January Food Security Outlook report, the food security situation has remained stable and acute food insecurity outcomes are Minimal (IPC Phase 1). As the annual lean season comes to an end, most households continue to depend on market purchases for their staple food and fewer households currently have access to their green harvests compared to previous years. This is due to the delayed start of season and replanting (especially in southern parts of the country), and the lower quantity of green maize, squash, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts that are usually available to rural households during this time of the year. Limited access to green foods and subsequently poor dietary diversity is more pronounced in the southern areas of the country.

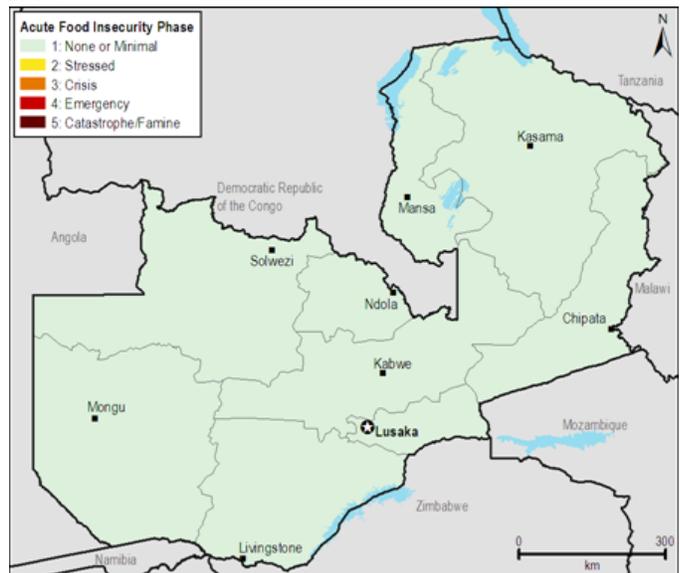
After a delayed start of season there was widespread rainfall from late December to mid-January, followed by intermittent dry spells in the southern parts of the country, which have extended into the month of March. Although the crop conditions in most high producing areas of southern Zambia are fair to good, the yields are likely to be reduce further if rainfall does not resume and if more dry spells set in during the critical period of grain filling, when water is most required. Based on field reports, current yield reductions are estimated to be 30-40 percent as a result of erratic rainfall. While the area planted under cotton is down, the crop is in fairly good condition in the southern half of the country; unlike soybean crops which have been significantly affected by the erratic rainfall even though the area planted has increased. In the already marginal producing areas of Gwembe, Sinazongwe, Kazungula (Southern province), Sesheke, Shangombo and Senanga districts (Western province), field reports indicated that

Figure 1. Projected food security outcomes, March 2013.



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Projected food security outcomes, April - June 2013.



Source: FEWS NET

This map represents *acute* food insecurity outcomes relevant for emergency decision-making. It does not necessarily reflect *chronic* food insecurity.

most crops including sorghum are water stressed and some have wilted. These observations are supported by satellite data showing stressed crop conditions (Figure 3) due to a combination of erratic rainfall and high temperatures. The extent of the impact of erratic rainfall on crops will only be known after ongoing crop estimates are completed. Following extended dry spells, risk of flooding and displacement has been significantly reduced even with the opening of two spillway gates at Kariba Dam. No downstream flooding has so far been reported. Water levels in the flood plains of western Zambia are also lower.

Figure 3. Maize soil water index as of March 20, 2013.

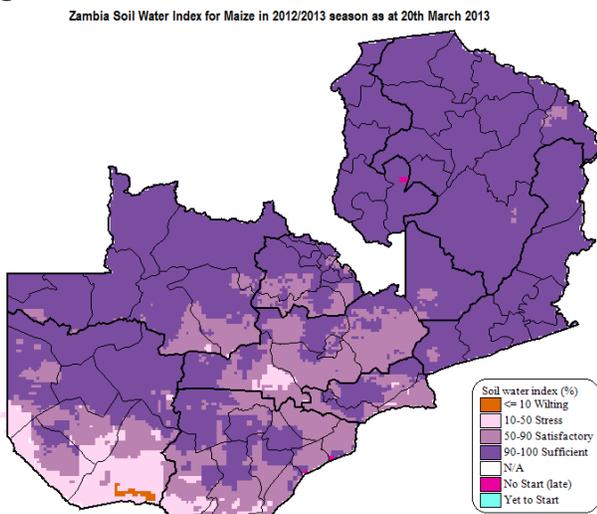
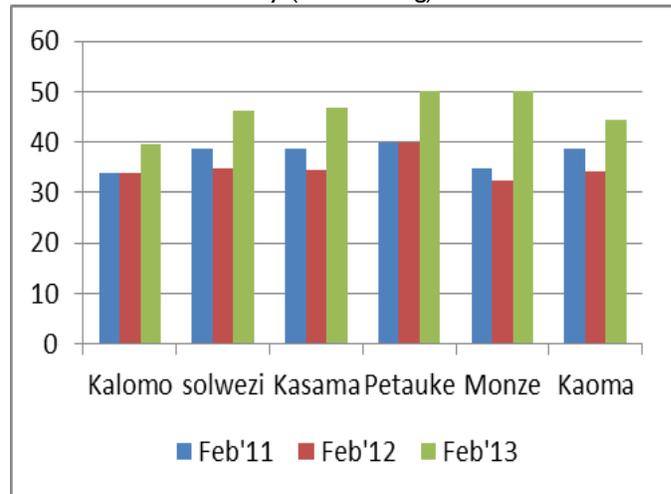


Figure 4. Comparative roller meal prices in selected districts for the month of February (ZMW/25Kg).



Despite the high staple food demand on the market from both urban and rural consumers, the maize market is generally well supplied as the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) continues to sell maize to millers and needy rural communities with their current stocks (estimated at no less than 600,000 MT). The sporadic maize meal shortage in a few areas, especially some border towns and the Copperbelt towns, was triggered by maize/meal export restrictions which increased informal maize meal exports to Tanzania and the DRC. While the above market FRA purchase price (ZMW65/50Kg) gave small scale farmers good returns, most oversold their stocks early on and are currently buying maize/meal at prices above last season (Figure 4), constraining the purchasing power of poorer households. The Government directive for refined brand maize meal to be sold at no more than ZMW50/25Kg bag has made it uneconomical for large millers to sell the meal in rural areas with low milling capacity, which has also contributed to the sporadic shortage in these areas. With the continued export restrictions, there is still adequate maize in the country to last up to the end of the current marketing season in April and a little beyond. Apart from the 20,000 MT sold to Tanzania, the government allowed private traders to export 35,000 MT while government (through the FRA) will be exporting 50,000 MT of maize to Malawi through a bilateral agreement.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The current situation has not changed the assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the period of March to June 2013. A full discussion of the scenario is available in the Zambia [January Food Security Outlook](#).

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JUNE 2013

The food security situation is expected to remain stable up to the end of May and will improve in June as the new harvest becomes increasingly available, reducing the pressure on markets in high producing rural areas. While the maize harvest is expected to be adequate to meet national level demand, most households in the marginal producing areas of extreme southern Zambia are expected to depend on the market, and to a certain extent government support, shortly after harvest due to anticipated poor production. Overall the country will have adequate staple food supplies to assist households in these marginal producing areas without the need for external food assistance.