

Issue 3
2015

Southern Africa

Food & Nutrition Security Update

Special focus:

El Niño Seasonal Forecast
Oct 2015 to Mar 2016

September 2015

A report by the FNSWG



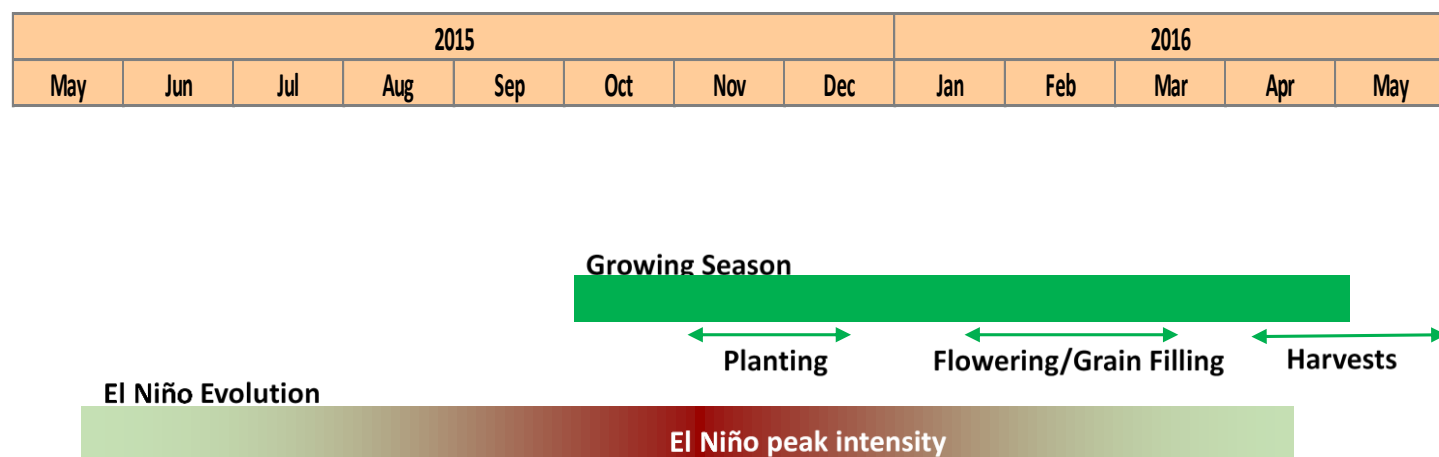
Main Highlights

The Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF) forecast of high likelihood of normal-to-below normal forecast over southern half of SADC region in the next cropping season, triggers an alarm bell. This warning will be compounded by the current food deficit resulting from a depressed 2014/15 harvest season that is impacting negatively on most of the food markets in the region, especially by driving prices higher than the normal trend in an analogous period.

The current El Niño event was officially declared in March 2015 and is expected to peak at the end of 2015 and remain active until the first quarter of 2016, therefore influencing most of the agricultural season in this region as depicted in **Figure 1**. For Southern Africa, this usually means less rainfall in most of the countries but high rainfall in northern Tanzania and DRC. If this is realised, the region could face another poor rainfall season and harvest, which coupled to the eroded productive capacity of vulnerable farming households, the already low regional cereal stocks and high grain prices, would result in significant increase in food and nutrition insecurity in the region.

At the moment the estimated number of food insecure people in the region stands at 13.4 million coupled by an increased risk of severe and acute malnutrition. The updated figures will be provided in the next issue of the Food and Nutrition Security Update as soon as on-going assessments and analyses by member states are completed.

Figure 1: Projected El Niño intensity during the agricultural season.



A. Regional Update

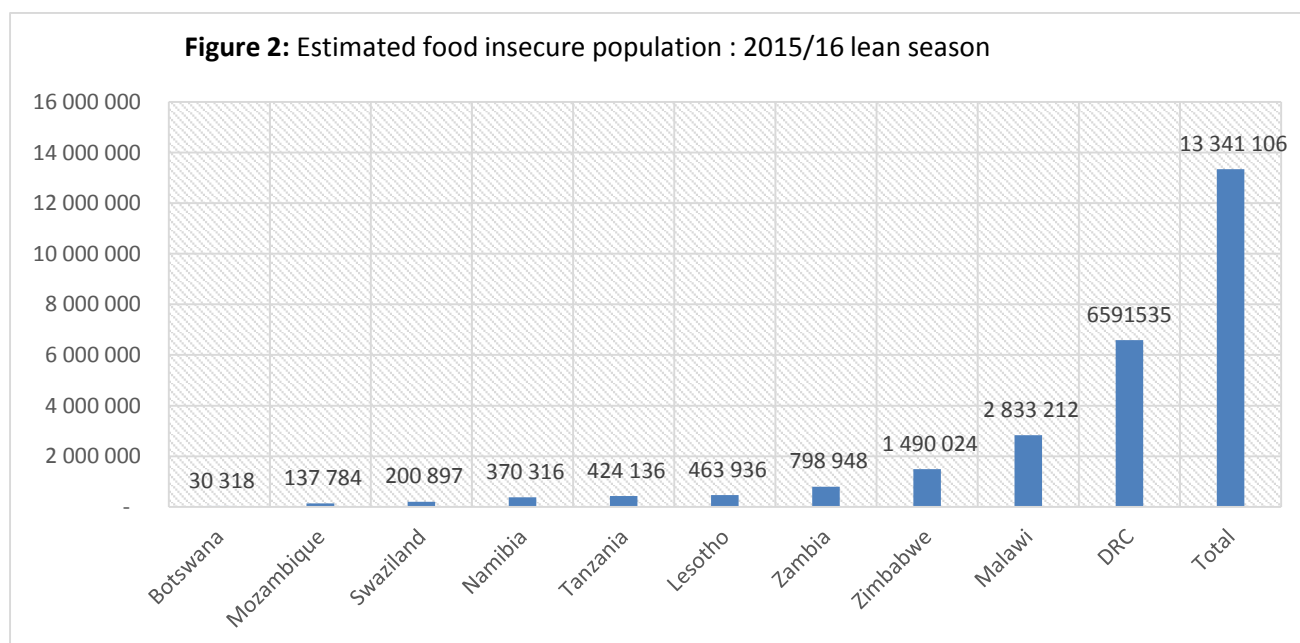
The regional food security situation is worrisome, given the decline in overall cereal production and availability. This is largely due to unfavourable weather conditions from the previous season, characterised by late onset of the rainy season, prolonged dry spells, floods and cyclones.

The cereal harvest in the SADC region (excluding Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles) decreased by 21% from 42.98 million tonnes in 2014 to 33.84 million tonnes in 2015. Although this is still 3% above the past five year average production of 32.94 million tonnes, it is coupled by local currency depreciation, which contributes to abnormal price increases. Individually, most of the SADC Member States will require increased amounts of cereal imports to balance the supply and demand equation,

while others will require timely humanitarian assistance during 2015/2016 marketing year. The estimated food insecure population for the 2015/16 season currently stands at 13.4 million (**Figure 2**).

Poor households in southern parts of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar, Lesotho, and Angola have already finished their own production stocks earlier than normal and will experience an earlier lean season this year.

As the regional cereal supply decreases and prices increase, the situation will likely deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity, from October to December in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar, Lesotho, and Angola. Elsewhere in the region, households are expected to experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity outcomes between July and December.



B. El Niño and Seasonal Forecast Implications for the Region

The recently released SARCOF¹ seasonal rainfall forecast for October 2015 to March 2016 indicated that the southern half of the region generally has increased likelihood of receiving normal to below normal rainfall, while the northern half of the region has increased chances of normal to above normal rainfall. With increased likelihood of drier than average conditions affecting the growing season over the southern half of the region, there is a high chance of continued increased shortfalls in maize production, particularly in South Africa, Zimbabwe and southern Malawi. Historical crop statistics clearly reflect a negative impact of El Niño events on regional maize production. Drops in maize yield over a five-year average are systematically higher in El Niño seasons than in neutral or La Niña seasons.

The current El Niño event is anticipated to be one of the strongest of the past 35 years². The event could result in an erratic start of the season in southern parts of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe

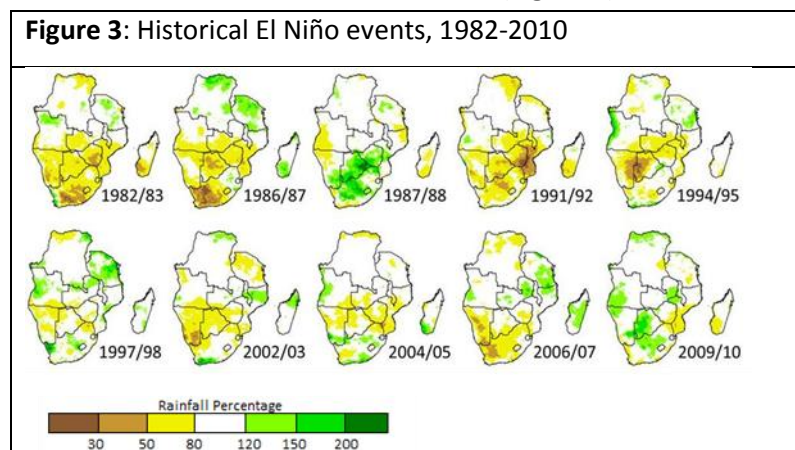
¹ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/southern-africa/document/statement-19th-southern-africa-regional-climate-outlook-forum>

² The current highest recorded intensity is from the 97-98 event. If the current event exceeds it then it will be the new record since 1900.

resulting in reduced planted areas, delayed planting, depressed productivity, which limit agricultural labour opportunities and reduce household income.

Additionally, El Niño may result in the likelihood of crop and livestock disease outbreaks in endemic areas between November 2015 and May 2016, diminished pasture in rangeland and drinking water availability for animals, and deterioration of livestock body conditions resulting in movement of livestock in search of relief grazing and forced destocking.

The effect of an El Niño may not be clear-cut and require qualification on a case-by-case basis. Firstly, El Niño impacts are not consistent for all El Niño events, and there is significant variability in some areas from one El Niño event to the next (**Figure 3**).



Northern Mozambique and Tanzania; parts of Zambia and the bulk of DRC) slightly below normal rainfall amounts may remain within the amount that is adequate for maize and staple food production.

In addition, many of these northern areas are not consistently negatively affected by El Niño. In contrast, above normal rainfall does not

necessarily equate to good production prospects if the rainfall distribution is erratic. Where the normal rainfall is marginally adequate for crop production as having enhanced chances for normal to below normal rainfall, meaning that a significant decline in the amount of rain would cause a huge loss of potential harvest output in the next marketing season.

The potential impacts of the most likely outcomes determined in the SARCOF rainfall forecast should therefore be considered in the context of normal rainfall amounts, soil moisture levels, water availability and current food security status in the different countries.

Three main issues will determine what the impact of El Niño will be during the season. The first is the modifying influence of local and regional climate systems. El Niño events are known to have variable impacts, and not all El Niño events historically have resulted in reduced rainfall. The state of regional oceans and atmospheric conditions, particularly in the Indian Ocean, can have modifying influences that can enhance or ameliorate typical El Niño outcomes. In this regard, some areas tend to be more consistently affected by El Niño than others.

The second issue, assuming a negative El Niño impact, is the ability of the economies (private, public and humanitarian) to bridge the gaps and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. For this to succeed regional markets should remain integrated, without artificial policy controls and traders should see their role facilitated when moving goods from surplus to deficit areas, including their expectations about the likelihood of a normal cropping season.

The third aspect has to do with the ability to share information that help farmers overcome the challenges posed by El Niño and the generally negative forecasts for the 2015/2016 season, including facilitation of credit, timely provision of adequate and appropriate inputs (short cycle and drought tolerant varieties recommended), enhancement of irrigation schemes, release of timely rainfall information, etc.

C. Country Analysis

Lesotho

The seasonal rainfall outlook issued in September 2015 by the Ministry of Energy and Meteorology forecast hot and dry weather conditions during the coming rainfall season. In Lesotho, rain usually falls in August and September, however the country has been experiencing dry conditions since August. Even though these rains might not be enough for planting, they do soften the ground to allow for land preparation.

Average to below average rainfall is anticipated countrywide from October to March 2016. The outlook states that there is a likelihood of a meteorological drought in the coming season. Agricultural cultivation will be hampered by insufficient soil moisture and food security could deteriorate as a result. The dry conditions could also lead to reduced fresh water supplies during the summer season, which could increase chances of health risks and disease-outbreaks due to the consumption of untreated stagnant water from unsafe water sources.

Madagascar

Northern and central Madagascar is expected to receive above-normal rainfall, while the south is expecting to receive normal to below-normal rainfall. The above normal rains in Madagascar could also result in increased chances of flooding which in the past has also affected agricultural/cropping activities. For the Southern areas, increased chances of normal to below normal rains will also likely result in drought conditions. The CFSAM assessment conducted by FAO and WFP in July will provide an update on the number of vulnerable people.

Nutrition data from three nutritional assessments conducted between February and April 2015 in Southern Madagascar indicated a deteriorated nutrition situation for children aged 6 to 59 months, reaching crisis level in some districts:

- In February 2015, a Multi-Sectoral Rapid Assessment was conducted and the findings suggested that the most vulnerable districts at that time were Amboassary (Anosy region), Bekily and Ambovombe (Androy region).
- In addition secondary nutrition data analysis indicated an increase in the number of admissions in 2015 from January to March compared to the same period in 2013 and 2014. The increase in SAM admissions was more pronounced in the three most vulnerable districts.
- In early April 2015, UNICEF supported ONN and MoH to conduct an exhaustive screening for acute malnutrition among children aged 6 to 59 months in 6 of the 7 affected districts namely Ambovombe, Amboassary, Beloha, Betioky, Ampanihy, and Tsihombe. Rates of global acute undernutrition (MUAC less than 125 mm or edemas) range from 7.1% to 15.1% while the rates of severe acute undernutrition (MUAC less than 115 mm or edemas) range from 2.0% to 3.2%.

With the likely increased of food insecurity in Southern Madagascar, close monitoring of the nutrition situation of children will remain important and nutrition emergency ongoing actions need to be continued and food security and nutrition emergency preparedness actions towards a further deterioration are critical.

Malawi

The total food insecure population in the 2015-16 consumption year is estimated to reach 2.8 million people during the peak of the lean season January to March 2016. The FEWS NET Outlook for August – December 2015 projects an increased competition for labour work from October, with some households anticipated to migrate to Mozambique and Zambia to find work. Between October and December, households in the southern and central areas will require humanitarian assistance as they continue to experience livelihood protection deficits and food consumption gaps (IPC Phase 3).

The 2015/16 rainfall season prospects for Malawi predicts high chances of normal (40%) to above-normal (35%) rainfall amounts. Below normal rainfall is expected towards the end of the season in some areas particularly in the Shire Valley. Flood- and drought-prone areas are likely to experience extreme weather events such as floods and prolonged dry spells respectively.

Between June and July 2015, nutrition surveys were undertaken in flood affected areas across 16 districts categorized in the following five different livelihood zones, Rift Valley Escarpment, Lower Shire, Thyolo - Mulanje Tea Estates, Shire Highlands and Lake Chilwa Phalombe Plain. The surveys indicated acceptable Global acute malnutrition rates ranging from 0.6% [0.1-2.6] in Shire Highlands to 2.8% [1.2-6.3] Lower Shire. Across all livelihood zones, exclusive breastfeeding rates were above 80%. The survey also indicated relatively poor household food security condition as the proportion of household with high dietary diversity ranged from 20.6% in Lower Shire to 28.2% in Shire Highlands. As of September 2nd, 2015, 16,008 children under-five children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) have been admitted in Outpatient Therapeutic Programmes (OTP) and Nutrition Rehabilitation Units (NRUs). Programme performance (cure rate) stands respectively at over 95 % and 89.1% of children discharged from OTP and NRU were cured respectively.

Technical assistance is being provided through on-job mentorship to health workers on community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) and rapid SMS reporting on nutrition growth monitoring at health facilities in food insecure districts, for example Rumphi district.

The undertaking of a nutrition survey is under discussion to get up-to-date nutrition data status from young children as food insecurity is tightening up in Malawi.

Mozambique

The rainfall forecast for October- December 2015 predicts normal rainfall with a bias towards above normal throughout the provinces of Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Nampula and northern Zambezia. These above normal rains in the northern areas including Zambezia province increases chances of flooding. Normal rainfall with a bias toward below normal rainfall is expected in Tete, Manica, Sofala, Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo provinces.

South Africa

There is evidence that the likelihood of the country experiencing extreme dry and hot conditions towards the summer season is high. This could promote a regional or localised drought. The forecasting system indicates high probabilities of below-normal rainfall for the start of the summer

season. This is expected to continue throughout the season with relatively small chances for above-normal rainfall for localized areas.

Swaziland

The national rainfall outlook for 2015/16 show a generally increased chance of normal to above normal rainfall throughout the country during the October to December period. The Highveld region has chances of above normal to normal rainfall while the Middleveld has chances of normal to below normal rainfall over most parts of the region. The Lowveld region forecast a chance of normal to above-normal rainfall and in Lubombo, above to below normal rainfall is expected.

Between November and January, normal to above-normal rainfall is expected over the western half of the country, while the eastern parts are likely to receive normal to below normal rainfall in the Lowveld and a normal to above-normal rainfall in Lubombo.

Tanzania

The rainfall outlook for October to December is for the short rainfall season (*Vuli*). *Vuli* rainfall is more significant in the North-eastern highlands, northern Kigoma and Northern coastal areas. The forecast indicates higher chances of above-normal rainfall to normal (sufficient) rainfall over most parts of bimodal areas. However, pockets of below normal rainfall are expected over the southern parts of the country. Soil moisture levels are likely to be enhanced due to the expected above-normal rainfall and this can benefit the cropping season over the bimodal areas. However, short periods of heavy rainfall may cause excessive surface runoff and elevate flood risks during the season. Outbreak of water borne diseases due to water source pollution are likely to occur.

The seasonal rainfall over unimodal areas (Western, Central, Southern Region) are more significant during November to April. During the October, November and December (OND) period, normal to above-normal rainfalls are expected in these areas.

Zambia

The Zambia Meteorology Department's forecast released in September 2015 states that Zambia has a likelihood of receiving normal to below normal rainfall during the coming rain season. For the October-December period, much of the country is likely to receive normal to below normal rainfall except for the extreme north-eastern parts, with the likelihood of receiving normal rainfall. For December-February, the whole country is likely to receive normal rainfall.

Zimbabwe

The total food insecure population in the 2015-16 consumption year is estimated to reach 1.5 million people during the peak of the lean season. Livelihood options are projected to be constrained in most parts of the country, especially in the south. The rainfall outlook for October to December 2015 predicts below normal rainfall for the Mashonaland Provinces, Midlands, Manicaland and Harare,

while the rest of the country expects normal to below normal rainfall. There is a high likelihood of a late start of the season for the whole country with rain expected to start after October as observed in the last season. However, for January- March 2016, the rainfall situation is expected to improve with the forecast of high chances of normal rainfall. A short rainfall season (December-February) is expected mainly in the districts that produce about 70% of the national cereal.

The 2015 Zimbabwe Food Security Response Plan indicate that severe acute malnutrition varies from 0.8 % to 5.5 % per province with the national average being 2.3 %, up from 1.5% last year. The response plan indicates that all but three provinces (Midlands, Mashonaland central and Masvingo) reported increased in SAM figures in 2015 when compared to 2014. Children in Midlands and Masvingo provinces remain at increased risk of severe and acute malnutrition due to the food insecurity situation prevalent in the provinces.

D. Key Recommendations

The FNSWG urges coordinated monitoring and planning by governments, donors, ICPs and all relevant stakeholders to respond to the current food and nutrition status and prepare for the coming season. In particular, the following short and medium term recommendations are proposed:

- Enhance resilience building programmes and actions geared towards increasing preparedness and early response. This includes urgent disbursement of funds by member states and international donor community to activate member states' emergency preparedness and response plans.
- It is highly recommended that medium and shorter range weather forecasts be monitored for the development of conditions that may alter or strengthen the outcome of the current forecast.
- Continuous monitoring rainfall during planting and growing season of the crops by Early Warning Units (EWUs).
- Governments to utilise tools and instruments like Africa Risk Capacity (ARC) weather-index based insurance products that could support early action and drought mitigation.
- Strengthen child nutrition situation analysis in each country with a focus to sub-national areas known to be the most vulnerable through trend analysis and SMART surveys.
- Strengthen community mobilisation network capacities for early identification of severe and moderate acute malnutrition cases to treatment facilities, community sensitization on acute malnutrition, infant and young child feeding, hygiene and sanitation
- Preposition nutrition commodities in vulnerable areas and support capacity strengthening to support the management of severe and moderate acute malnutrition in each country
- Encouraging timely planting of small grains and other short season/early maturing crops using conservation agriculture and other climate smart techniques to take advantage of the short-cropping window period during the season.
- Strengthening of health and nutrition education programs and continuous monitoring of food and nutrition security indicators
- Maximize use of existing irrigation assets (dams, boreholes, rivers) and water harvesting.
- Market monitoring of key variables, including prices of staples, direction of trade, marketing conditions, change of policies or regulations, etc.

- Provide early warning information on the likelihood of crop and livestock disease outbreak as well as diminished pasture
- Institute stringent measures to prevent livestock disease outbreaks such as early vaccination and quarantine to restrict mobility of livestock to and from within and outside the countries in the region.

Editorial Team

AGENCY	CONTACT PERSON	EMAIL
FAO REOSA	Gertrude Kara	Gertrude.kara@fao.org
FEWSNET	Phumzile Mdladla Godfrey Kafera	PMdladla@fews.net GKafera@fews.net
OCHA	Hein Zeelie Alois Ndambukia	zeelie@un.org ndambukia@un.org
OXFAM	Alexandre Gachoud Daniel Sinnathamby	AGachoud@oxfam.org.uk DSinnathamby@oxfam.org.uk
SADC FANR	Bentry Chaura	bchaura@sadc.int
WFP	Andrew Odero Veronica Rammala	andrew.odero@wfp.org veronica.rammala@wfp.org

Acknowledgments: We are grateful to the respective country teams from the various agencies in providing contributions to this report. Additional information is obtained from relevant websites as reflected in the main body of the report where applicable.

The Food Security Update is jointly produced by the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group – Southern Africa. The overall mission of the Group is to contribute to enhanced programming for improved Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods in southern Africa.