Complete crop failure of main season crops in parts of the South

KEY MESSAGES

- Although average to above-average rainfall was observed in March, poor rainfall during most of the rainy season has resulted in very poor crop production levels with some complete crop failures across most of Androy region, as well as below-average rainfed crop production in the western part of the country. Drought conditions will likely lead to below-average cassava and off-season harvest as well.

- In the region of Androy and Amboasary, limited food access for the poor due to failed harvests and high staple food prices have caused many poor households to sell atypical levels of small animals and kitchen items and intensify migration to neighboring towns in an attempt to cope. However, despite these activities, households are not expected to be able to meet their basic food and nonfood needs through September and will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity.

- Looking beyond September, food insecurity, in terms of magnitude and severity, will likely increase as food insecure areas of the South approach the peak of the 2016/17 lean season between January and March 2017.

CURRENT SITUATION

National

In most areas of the country outside of the deep South and West, an on-time and near-average rice harvest ended the lean season in mid-April. In general, this harvest increased national food supply levels and contributed to a general decrease in local rice prices in most key production areas, such as Marovoay, Miainarivo, Ambatondrazaka. Income levels in these areas are similar to previous years.

In the western part of the country, rainfed crops were affected by the drought this year. Consequently, a below-average maize harvest was reported in Menabe and Melaky and household food stocks are expected to deplete earlier than usual.

Areas of concern: Androy and part of Anosy regions

Crop production
The recent rainfall beginning in March was too late to mitigate the widespread and severe impacts of the drought earlier in the season on maize crop production. Although some households replanted maize in March, these crops are unlikely to fully develop as the rainy season is coming to an end. Consequently, main season crop production is expected to be well below average with some complete crop failures across parts of the Androy region and in the district of Amboasary Atsimo.
In addition, the area planted in off-season crops is well below average due to the low rainfall levels. For example, in Ambovombe and Amboasary, planting activities for beans were both below average and delayed. Consequently, the bean harvest is expected to occur in June this year, compared to March to May in a normal year. Cassava plants are generally more resilient to drought compared to other crops although current reports suggest that cassava plants are also under stress at this time and will likely produce smaller tubers than usual this year.

**Staple food prices**

Normally, harvests of main season food crops in April would cause retail prices of locally produced foods to fall. However, due to the effects of the well below-average production in most areas, current food prices remain at lean season levels. Furthermore, cassava is usually harvested in August and is not yet available in the market. Given poor local production, most households are relying on market purchases of imported rice, whose price is at the same as last year’s levels (1400 Ar/kg for Ambovombe and 1575 Ar /Kg for Tsihombe), according to key informants in the area.

**Coping strategies**

Normally at this time period, households are rebuilding their livestock herds in order to prepare for the next lean season. However this year, households continue to sell animals, such as cows in Tsihombe and goats and lambs in Ambovombe and Amboasary, in addition to household items in order to access food given the failed season.

Additionally, migration as a coping strategy has intensified compared to previous months, particularly in Amboasary (livelihood zone 22), with most households going to Fort Dauphin in order to seek daily labor opportunities. Meanwhile in Tsihombe and Beloha (livelihood zone 24), labor migration normally occurs between October to February (between crop planting activities and harvests) but this year is continuing beyond February as households are looking for additional incomes to compensate the poor harvest. The most cited final destination for households in Tsihombe and Beloha remains the capital of the districts and the region of Boeny.

Finally, key informants report that despite it being the typical harvest period, households continue to reduce the number of meals consumed per day compared to a normal year. The consumption of cactus peas, a typical lean season food, also prevail.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

The current situation has not affected most of the assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s [most likely scenario for the period of February to September 2016](https://www.fews.net/index.php?w=2257). However the following assumptions have been updated:

- Off season crop production (i.e. cowpeas in Ambovombe and Tsihombe and beans in Amboasary Atsimo and Bekily) will be below average.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2016**

Through September, households in most areas of the country will be classified as in Minimal/None (IPC Phase 1) as the ongoing harvest is expected to last at least until September, similar to a normal year. Off-season production is already beginning in some areas including the central part of the country and income level will likely to be near average. During the scenario period (May to September) households will rely on own production as their primary food source.

In Androy and in the district of Amboasary Atsimo, food access will continue to be limited due to very poor harvests and/or complete crop failures, as well limited off-season crop production opportunities. In some areas, harvests of cassava will lessen food insecurity during the second half of the outlook period (July to September), although atypical coping (migration, sale of household items and animals, etc.) and reduced food consumption will continue for households in the Androy region and in the district of Amboasary Atsimo, in line with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity. Additionally, in neighboring areas that were affected by the drought to a lesser degree and in certain areas of Melaky and Menebe that also experienced below-average production, households will begin to have difficulties affording both essential food and nonfood expenditures once household food stocks deplete earlier than usual and will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) between July and September 2016.

Looking beyond September 2016, food insecurity, in terms of magnitude and severity, will likely increase in drought-affected areas with the approach the peak of the 2016/17 lean season (January to March 2017).