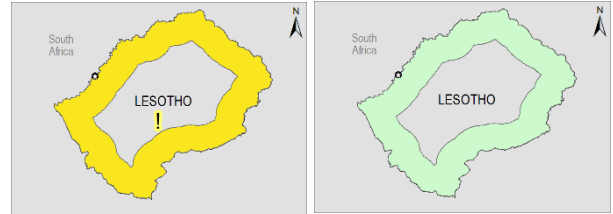


Humanitarian assistance improves acute food insecurity outcomes this peak lean season

KEY MESSAGES

- As the lean season progresses, households face limited options for income and food sources and are relying mostly on casual labor for cash to purchase food and essential non-food items. Food prices remain above average, but have gradually declined since April 2016.
- FEWS NET has learned that approximately 90 percent of the population facing survival food deficits this consumption year are receiving in-kind and cash assistance, allowing households to cover their food gaps and non-food needs. As a result, Lesotho is projected to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) from February through April 2017, in the presence of humanitarian assistance. In the absence of ongoing assistance, the country would be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity outcomes are expected for the remainder of the outlook period once the harvesting period peaks in May.
- Similar to the rest of the region, rainfall in Lesotho continues to be above average. In general, crops are currently in good condition and harvest prospects are positive. Assuming current rainfall conditions prevail, it is expected that an average harvest will be achieved this season. This should improve food insecurity outcomes in Lesotho during the next consumption year.

Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2017 (left), and June to September 2017 (right).



Highest estimated level of food insecurity in significant areas of concern using IPC 2.0 Area Reference Tables:

- Phase 1: Minimal
- Phase 2: Stressed
- Phase 3+: Crisis or higher

! Severity significantly mitigated by assistance

Source: FEWS NET

This map represents acute food insecurity outcomes relevant for emergency decision-making. It does not necessarily reflect chronic food insecurity. To learn more about this scale, visit www.fews.net/ipc

ZONE	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
<i>All zones</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incomes are below normal and staple prices remain above average. Incessant rains are disrupting casual labor activities by very poor and poor households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening income gaps as the window period for casual labor weeding closes. Food consumption gaps expected until the start of green consumption and harvesting.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2017

As the lean season progresses, households face limited options for income and food sources and are relying mostly on casual labor for cash to purchase food and essential non-food items. Food prices remain above average, but have gradually declined since April 2016. Nonetheless, the high staple prices continue to constrain food access for households. Labor activities include weeding, the application of fertilizer, and ridging in fields of Irish potatoes. However, since the usual window of time for weeding crops is ending, casual labor opportunities are slowly declining, which is likely to contribute to increased income gaps among households between now and the green and main harvest. If rainfall and seasonal progress continues on its current pace, household are anticipating that consumption of green crops would start in March, and this should provide some relief to households. Access to the main harvest is estimated to occur in the next two months. In the mountainous region, a few households have already started consuming green foods from crops that were planted early.

Similar to the rest of the region, rainfall in Lesotho continues to be above average. Despite ground saturation and waterlogging, the heavy rains this season are a welcome improvement for Lesotho, following the 2015/16 rainy season, which was one of the driest seasons in history. In general, crops are currently in good condition and harvest prospects are positive. There are only isolated cases of crop damage among farmers who planted along the main riverbanks (a traditionally prohibitive area by environmental authorities). The mountainous characteristic of the country is believed to be playing a big role in reducing the impact of heavy rainfall by providing good drainage and reducing erosion. Most crops have reached reproductive stage whilst some are still at vegetative stage especially in the South-Western areas, where the onset of rains was slightly late. Assuming current rainfall conditions will prevail, it is expected that an average harvest will be achieved this season. This should improve food insecurity outcomes in Lesotho during the next consumption year.

During last year’s drought, Lesotho suffered critical water shortages, so the heavy rains this season have improved conditions, and most river basins and catchment areas are expected to reach normal capacity this season. Furthermore, this will also benefit the country’s economy, which also relies significantly on exporting water to neighboring South Africa. It is therefore expected that water exports will be normal during the coming dry season, thereby ensuring foreign currency inflows into the country. In addition to this, domestic water use for animals and human consumption is expected to be normal during the outlook period. Pastures have also improved significantly across the country. Since Lesotho relies on sheep and goats for wool, mohair, and meat, improved livestock conditions will improve household earnings in the coming month. Unfortunately, pasture conditions in the South-Western areas are still below normal, as shown by the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) (Figure 2). This is because of the later start of season in the area and lower cumulative rainfall level in comparison to the rest of the country.

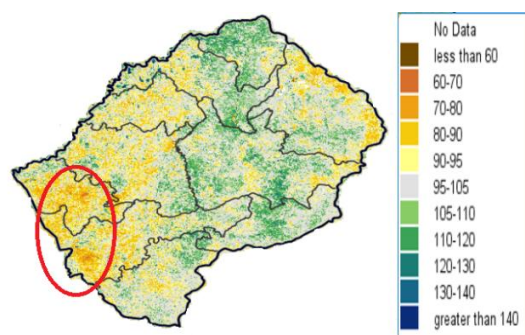
The high staple prices combined with low incomes continue to reduce purchasing power, especially for market dependent poor households, leading to continued food consumption gaps. However, FEWS NET has learned that approximately 90 percent of the population facing survival food deficits this consumption year are receiving in-kind and cash assistance through WFP, UNICEF, World Vision, and Action Aid programming. Targeted households that are receiving assistance are able to cover their food gaps and non-food needs. As a result, Lesotho is projected to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) from February through April 2017, in the presence of humanitarian assistance. In the absence of ongoing assistance, the country would be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity outcomes are expected for the remainder of the outlook period once the harvesting period peaks in May.

Figure 1. Maize field, Mohale’s Hoek.



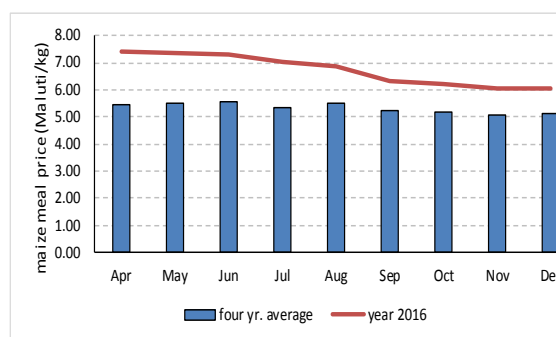
Source: WFP

Figure 2. Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) as of February 1-10, 2016.



Source: FEWS NET/USGS

Figure 3. Maseru maize meal prices.



Source: WFP

ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING

In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. [Learn more about our work here.](#)