LESOTHO Remote Monitoring Update October 2017

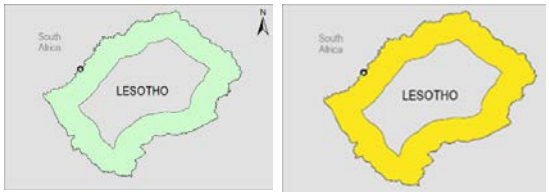
The 2017-18 lean season period is expected to be milder than last year

KEY MESSAGES

- Following a well above-average national harvest, food supplies are readily available in markets even as the lean season period approaches. The upcoming lean season is expected to be much less severe than what was experienced last year because of the 2015/16 El Niño-induced drought. According to the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS, July 2017), maize imports for the 2017/18 marketing year are expected to be about 55,000 MT.

- As reported in July, the estimated food insecure population for 2017/18 is much lower than average, however the annual Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis still estimates that approximately 225,000 people are likely to be food insecure at the peak of the lean season (Dec. 2017-Feb. 2018). Very poor and poor households in marginal production areas, particularly Mohale's Hoek, Mafeteng, Mokhotlong, and Quthing districts, are likely to have livelihood protection deficits and very small food consumption gaps. Some areas are currently Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and this is expected to continue through February, with a chance of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes among households in isolated areas.

Projected food security outcomes, October to January 2018 (left), and February to May 2018 (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

- Food prices remain stable and seasonal increases are expected for the remainder of the year. Many off-farm labor opportunities are decreasing as on-farm labor slowly increases for very poor and poor households. October rainfall provided much needed soil moisture, enhancing agricultural preparations for the next season. A normal start to the 2017/18 rainy season is likely and total cumulative rainfall during the October/November 2017 – March 2018 period is likely to be average tending to below average rainfall. This rainfall forecast is likely to affect agriculture activities in some areas.

DISTRICT	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
Mohale's Hoek, Mafeteng, Mokhotlong, and Quthing	• Reduced livestock sales due to lack of surplus animals and high transport costs to the markets. • Lower than normal household herd sizes due to previous drought years.	• Above normal livestock prices.

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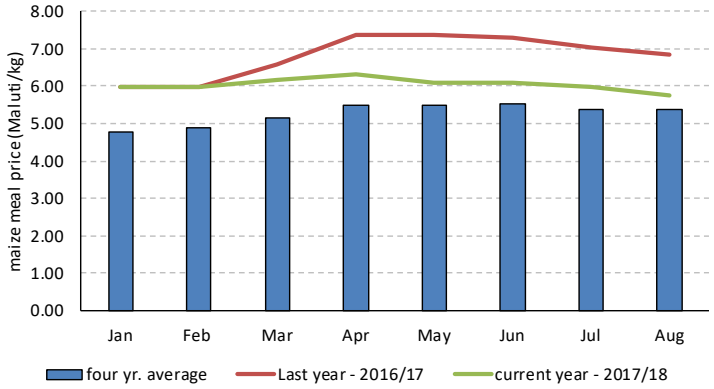
PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2018

As the 2017/18 lean season period approaches, it is expected to be milder than last year for very poor and poor households. The current food security situation is stable and is expected to stay that for most of the country, except for marginal production areas in the southern and western parts of the country. The 2017 bumper harvest has ensured food availability in source markets and at the household level.

Staple prices are stable this year. In Maseru, maize meal prices declined by about 9 percent between July and August. These price decreases are largely attributed to high local availability of cereal. August maize meal prices in Maseru were 16 percent lower than during the same month last year, but still about 7 percent above the five-year average. Staple price behavior is expected to be typical. Prices will gradually increase as the lean season peaks as household demand picks up and households become more market-dependent. Increasing prices during the December-March period will reduce purchasing power for many poor households, leading to some livelihood protection and marginal consumption gaps.

Figure 1. Maize meal prices for Maseru



Source: WFP/FEWS NET

Some very poor and poor households in the Southern Lowlands and Sequ River Valley Livelihood zones experienced below-normal production (despite high national production) and are expected to become fully dependent on market purchases and labor for food. Food access for these households during the lean season period is projected to be constrained because they will be vulnerable to market-related shocks. Income sources for poor households will mainly come from agricultural labor opportunities, but this income will probably not be enough to meet all household demands (including festive season, school fees, and inputs). Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are expected in these areas through February 2018, with a chance of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes among households in isolated areas

Some rains were received in the month of October, providing the required soil moisture to kick-start agriculture activities for the 2017/18 cropping season. Household have begun to focus on land preparation activities. Because of the good seasonal rainfall and crop performance last season, households are also anticipating a good next season as well, so on-farm labor opportunities are also increasing for very poor and poor households. Opportunities are expected to increase more in November as rainfall activity intensifies. Recent discussions about international forecast models by USGS and NOAA scientists indicate a normal start to the 2017/18 rainy season is likely and that total cumulative rainfall during the October/November 2017 – March 2018 period is likely to be average tending to below average rainfall in southern parts of Southern Africa (including Lesotho). In contrast, the latest forecast issued by the South Africa Seasonal Climate Watch on October 26 expects above-normal rainfall between November 2017 and February 2018. Since various climate drivers are at play forecast models will need to be monitored closely in the coming months.

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.