LESOTHO

AFTER THREE YEARS OF POOR AGRICULTURAL HARVEST, FOOD SECURITY IMPROVES SLIGHTLY

Overview

According to the results of the latest IPC Acute Food Insecurity analysis, about 179,000 people (12% of the analyzed population in rural areas of Lesotho) are facing high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3) in the current period from July to September 2021, and may require humanitarian action to reduce food gaps, protect and restore livelihood and prevent acute malnutrition. All ten analyzed rural districts of the country have been classified in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed) in the current period. From October 2021 to March 2022, around 312,000 people (21% of the analyzed population) are projected to be in IPC Phase 3. Seven of the analyzed districts are projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in this period.

Although heavy rains destroyed some crops in January 2021, causing waterlogging in some parts of the country, Lesotho registered an improvement in crop production this year due to the good seasonal rainfall performance, after three consecutive years (2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20) of poor agricultural production. Crop production is expected to boost the economy to the moderate growth of 2.6%. The increase in crop production also resulted in improved household food access. However, some poorer households across Senqu River Valley and mountain livelihood zones are expected to experience food consumption gaps before the start of the projected period, which is normally the lean season in Lesotho. Prices of food remained higher than both last year’s and the five year average and are expected to remain high in the projected period.

Key Drivers

Waterlogging
Heavy rains destroyed crops and property in January, resulting in waterlogging in several areas in the country.

Price shocks
Prices have remained higher than the five-year average and higher than last year.

Impact of COVID-19
Lockdown measures have caused a reduction in remittances, reducing purchasing power of remittance dependent households.

Current Situation July - September 2021

Phase 5 0 People in Catastrophe

Phase 4 0 People in Emergency

Phase 3 179,000 People in Crisis

Phase 2 577,000 People Stressed

Phase 1 719,000 People in food security

IN NEED OF URGENT ACTION

Projected Situation October 2021 - March 2022

Phase 5 0 People in Catastrophe

Phase 4 0 People in Emergency

Phase 3 312,000 People in Crisis

Phase 2 561,000 People Stressed

Phase 1 602,000 People in food security

IN NEED OF URGENT ACTION

Key for the Map

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification
(mapped Phase represents highest severity affecting at least 20% of the population)

- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Stressed
- 3 - Crisis
- 4 - Emergency
- 5 - Famine

Evidence Level

Acceptable
Medium
High
Scarcely evidence due to limited or no humanitarian access
CURRENT SITUATION MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (July - September 2021)

Key for the Map
IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification
(mapped Phase represents highest severity affecting at least 20% of the population)

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of relevant administrative unit level</th>
<th>Total population analysed</th>
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Note: A population in Phase 3+ does not necessarily reflect the full population in need of urgent action. This is because some households may be in Phase 2 or even 1 but only because of receipt of assistance, and thus, they may be in need of continued action.
CURRENT SITUATION OVERVIEW (July - September 2021)

During the current period (July to September 2021), all ten analyzed rural districts of the country have been classified in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed). The current period coincides with the post-harvest period in Lesotho when most households are expected to consume food from their own production as well as generate income from sale of agriculture crops, especially households with surplus. During this period, it is estimated that about 179,000 people (12% of the analyzed rural population) are in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) and require humanitarian action.

Heavy rains received in December and January resulted in damage to some fields and waterlogging at the critical growth stage for most crops. Weeding was negatively affected, resulting in reduced casual labour opportunities for poor households. Despite an increase in crop production this year compared to last season, it is still below that of 2009/10, based on the HEA analysis. After three years of consecutive poor harvest, crop production increased this year, resulting in households having more food from their own production, compared to the last three years. However, some households are likely to deplete their food stock from own their production within six months after harvest, with poor households likely to deplete within the first three months.

Food availability is expected to remain a minor limiting factor due to increased crop production as well as food available through imports from South Africa. Though food prices remain high compared to last year and the five-year average and are expected to remain high throughout the analysis periods, it is anticipated that households will continue to rely on markets as usual to cover their consumption. Food inflation has increased from 8.9% in April 2020 to 10.7% in May 2021 while overall inflation stood at 6.9%. This is going to affect those households that will deplete their stocks early in the consumption year.

Sources of livelihoods (casual labour, remittances, crop sales, beer brewing, petty trade, formal salary/wages, livestock sales or sale of livestock products) remained slightly lower than normal, thus implying deterioration in income from other sources. However, there is an increase in the number of farmers who planted crops during the 2020/21 agricultural season compared to the previous season.

Livestock body conditions improved compared to last year, following the timely onset of rains which resulted in improved rangelands. This is expected to benefit those households that rely on sales of wool and mohair for food and income, especially in the districts of Mokhotlong, Qachas Nek, Thaba Tseka and Quthing. While livestock prices remained almost the same as last year, the livestock market contracted, thus, farmers could sell fewer livestock than normal.

This year, nutrition is expected to be better compared to previous years. Moreover, compared to the previous year, the majority of households were not engaging in stress coping strategies due to improved crop and livestock production compared to the previous year.
### PROJECTED SITUATION MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (October 2021 - March 2022)

#### Key for the Map

**IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification**

(mapped Phase represents highest severity affecting at least 20% of the population)

- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Stressed
- 3 - Crisis
- 4 - Emergency
- 5 - Famine

**Evidence Level**

- ♥ - Acceptable
- ♥♥ - Medium
- ♥♥♥ - High
- ♥♥♥♥ - Scarcity evidence due to limited or no humanitarian access

#### Map Symbols

- IDPs/other settlements
- Urban settlement classification
- Area receives significant humanitarian food assistance (accounted for in Phase classification)
- Areas with inadequate evidence
- Areas not analysed

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PROJECTED SITUATION OVERVIEW (October 2021 - March 2022)

The projected period marks the lean season in Lesotho, when most households are expected to have depleted their own produced stocks and increased their reliance on purchases and casual labour for food and income. However, food prices could remain high compared to last year’s and the five-year average and will reduce the purchasing power of market dependent households.

During this period (October 2021 – March 2022), about 312,000 people (21% of the rural population analyzed) are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security conditions and may require humanitarian action to reduce food gaps, protect and restore livelihoods and prevent acute malnutrition. During this period, the total population that will likely experience high acute food insecurity is expected to be lower in number compared to the same time last year. Seven of the analyzed districts are projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) while the remaining three areas will continue to face a Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity situation.

The lean season is also the rainy season in Lesotho and normal rains have been forecast which are likely to allow farmers to start planting on time and hence increase casual labour opportunities for poor households. However, income from non-agricultural activities is expected to remain slightly below normal because of reduced remittances and limited job opportunities inside the country and South Africa. Livestock conditions are expected to remain fair to good due to improved rangelands and water sources.

Key Assumptions for the projected period

1. Rainfall: The International Research Institute (IRI, June 2021) predicts ENSO neutral conditions through August-October, a good probability of normal rains in the projected period.
2. Agricultural casual labour: Expected to be normal across the country due to normal rains expected.
3. Non-agricultural casual labour is expected to be slightly below normal due to reduced remittances and limited labour opportunities.
4. Seasonal employment: It is expected that opportunities for seasonal workers will remain below normal, and this will reduce seasonal jobs for Basotho migrants.
5. Markets/imports: South Africa recorded the second-largest grains harvest in a row, ensuring enough imports by Lesotho.
6. The markets both in rural and urban setting are expected to be fully operational in the projected period.
7. Food prices are extremely high and are expected to remain high in the projected period.
8. Livestock production and sales: Livestock conditions improved compared to last year and these conditions are expected to prevail in the projected period. However, livestock prices remained almost the same as last year, and the livestock market contracted, thus, farmers are expected to sell fewer animals than normal.
9. Border restrictions into South Africa will continue to reduce access to animal vaccines and semen (artificial insemination), thus, resulting in poor productivity and overall livestock conditions.
10. Employment: COVID-19 resulted in job losses which added to the already existing high unemployment in the country.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Response Priorities

- Urgent action is required to save lives, reduce food consumption gaps and protect livelihoods of all vulnerable people in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps.
- Provision of agricultural inputs to farming households that cannot afford access to inputs.
- Government to continue with the initiative of local purchase of grains and beans from local producers to promote market opportunities for farmers who have surplus from own produce.
- Reduction of food consumption gaps by improving access to food, through appropriate modalities.
- Promotion of livelihood assets and production systems through livestock vaccination campaigns and fodder production interventions.
- Promotion of resilience building initiatives, such as climate-smart agriculture.
- Returnee migrants should be prioritized for support to establish alternative livelihoods and should be included in social relief programmes.
- Livelihoods recovery programmes (i.e. agricultural inputs) for populations in Stressed (IPC Phase 2).
- Development of complementarity programmes (i.e. backyard gardening inputs for poor and very poor households).
- Capacity building programmes for populations in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or above.
- Food price subsidy intervention should be prioritized and well targeted.
- The government to continue implementing agricultural inputs subsidies to include the short seasoned varieties, and supply be made on time to facilitate timely planting.
- The National Strategic Resilience framework should be fully operationalized to ensure that households diversify their livelihoods to withstand future shocks.
- Intensify nutrition education with more emphasis on feeding practices inclusive of exclusive and recommended duration of breastfeeding.

Risk Factors to Monitor

Prices for staple food and agricultural inputs:

- Winter cropping prospects
- Prices of livestock feeds and drugs
- Rainfall patterns
- Conditions of rangelands
- Livestock and human diseases, especially the spread of COVID-19
- Income levels and food sources
- Inflation and its impact on the economy
PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

- After a refresher training on the morning of the 23rd of June, Lesotho’s IPC Technical Working Group conducted a face-to-face workshop from 23 to 29 June, to analyse data from different sources. This analysis was conducted observing the COVID-19 mitigation protocols. The IPC Global Support Unit (GSU) provided virtual technical assistance.

- Primary data was used for the food security indicators such as Food Consumption Score, Household Dietary Diversity Score, Household Hunger Scale, Livelihood Copying Strategy Index from the LVAC Main Assessment conducted in June 2021, with complementary data on prices from WFP monitoring and the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics.

- Trend analysis from the four previous years VAA and rapid assessments and analyses (2016-2021) was undertaken.

- The Household Economy Analysis (HEA) was also used to analyse data collected from key informants. Only the following key parameters were monitored: price of staples, price of food for work, remittances, beer brewing, agricultural labour opportunities and prices, crop production estimates from households, livestock numbers, livestock and livestock products prices.

- IPC AFI analysis was conducted to classify the severity of food insecurity in ten rural districts. The evidence level of this analysis, as defined in the IPC protocol 2.5, was assessed as Medium (Evidence Level 2).

Sources

- Assessment conducted by the LVAC in June 2021
- HEA Outcome Analysis, June 2021
- Trend analysis derived from the VAA by the LVAC since 2016
- COVID19 Country Reports
- GiEWS Lesotho Country Brief, July 2021
- WFP Data Viz for price projections
- Lesotho Bureau of Statistics price monitoring bulletins
- Lesotho Met Services Climate Outlook

Limitations of the analysis

The analysis lacked national crop production estimates representative at district level, as the annual crop forecasting estimates were not undertaken due to financial constraints.

What is the IPC and IPC Acute Food Insecurity?

The IPC is a set of tools and procedures to classify the severity and characteristics of acute food and nutrition crises as well as chronic food insecurity based on international standards. The IPC consists of four mutually reinforcing functions, each with a set of specific protocols (tools and procedures). The core IPC parameters include consensus building, convergence of evidence, accountability, transparency and comparability. The IPC analysis aims at informing emergency response as well as medium and long-term food security policy and programming.

For the IPC, Acute Food Insecurity is defined as any manifestation of food insecurity found in a specified area at a specific point in time of a severity that threatens lives or livelihoods, or both, regardless of the causes, context or duration. It is highly susceptible to change and can occur and manifest in a population within a short amount of time, as a result of sudden changes or shocks that negatively impact on the determinants of food insecurity.

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This analysis has been conducted under the patronage of the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee. It has benefited from the technical and financial support of FAO/GSU for the analysis and USAID for data collection.

Classification of food insecurity and malnutrition was conducted using the IPC protocols, which are developed and implemented worldwide by the IPC Global Partnership - Action Against Hunger, CARE, CILSS, EC-JRC, FAO, FEWSNET, Global Food Security Cluster, Global Nutrition Cluster, IGAD, Oxfam, PROGRESAN-SICA, SADC, Save the Children, UNICEF and WFP.