Briefing Note – 29 September 2015

Central America

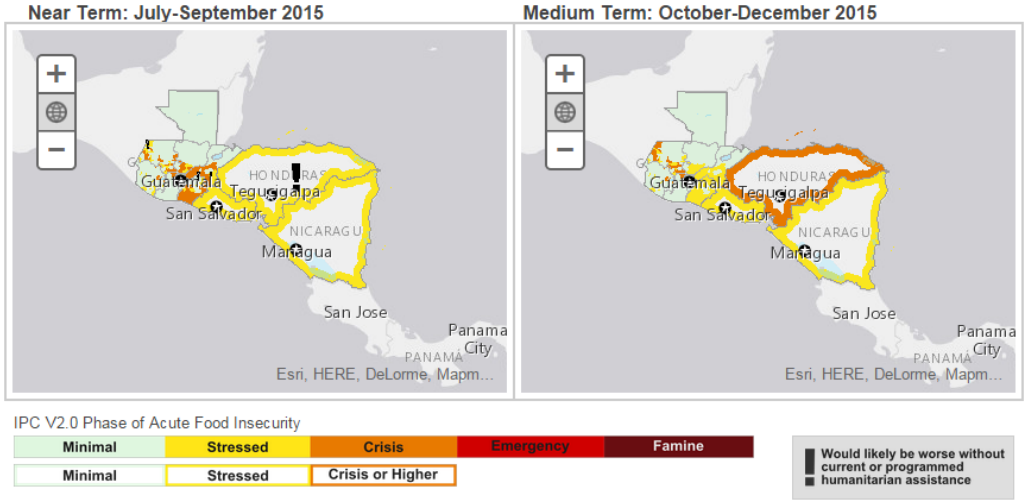
Drought in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua

	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Need for international assistance		X			

	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Expected impact			X		

Crisis Overview

500,000 people in the Central American "Dry Corridor", covering El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, are estimated to be facing severe food insecurity, while around 1.3 million are facing moderate food insecurity. An El Niño-related dry spell has resulted in significant crop losses during the *primera* season in all four affected countries for the second consecutive year, severely limiting food reserves in affected areas.



Source: FEWSNET 08/2015 (See bigger map on page 8)

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale

El Niño conditions are forecast to last until at least March 2016, it is unlikely that households will be able to recover during the *postrera* season.

In addition to the impact of the prolonged dry spell, the affected countries have also been affected by an epidemic of coffee rust in recent years, which has limited livelihood opportunities for day labourers and subsistence farmers dependent on the additional income. High seasonal food prices, limited labour opportunities, and crop losses are all factors impacting the food security situation of the affected population.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Food and livelihood assistance.
- Poor households in rural areas are most vulnerable.
- El Salvador and Honduras are the worst-affected countries.

Humanitarian constraints

General insecurity has been known to hamper the delivery of humanitarian assistance in El Salvador and Honduras.

Crisis Impact

A prolonged dry spell associated with the El Niño phenomenon has resulted in significant crop losses during the *primera* season (May-September) in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (FAO 14/09/2015). Maize is the main crop harvested during the *primera* season, while bean production mainly occurs during the August–December *postrera* season. FAO estimates that 2015 maize production will be 8% lower than last year's already substandard harvest in the four affected countries (FAO 14/09/2015).

An estimated 500,000 people in the "Dry Corridor" are facing severe food insecurity, while around 1.3 million are facing moderate food insecurity (OCHA 07/09/2015).

Last year an estimated 2.5 million people in the region were affected by El Niño-related drought conditions. This aggravates the impact of the current crop failures as households lack food reserves (FEWSNET 08/2015; OCHA 10/12/2014). More than 65% of households had no food stocks left by the start of the *primera* season (WFP 26/09/2015). The Central American Agricultural Council has declared a state of alert (FAO 14/09/2015).

El Niño conditions are expected to continue until March 2016, and the *postrera* season is also forecast to be severely affected. It is therefore very unlikely that the losses in the *primera* season will be recovered later in the year (International Research Institute for Climate and Society 17/09/2015; FAO 14/09/2015).

Food Security

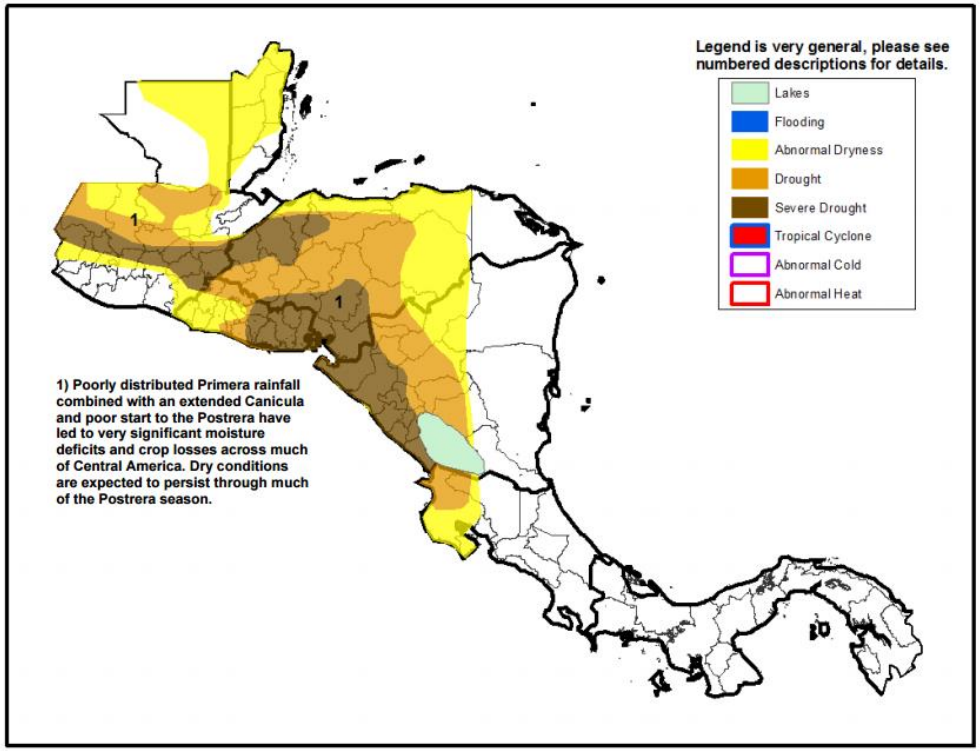
El Salvador: Some 156,000 people (39,000 households), mainly in the eastern and western regions, are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security outcomes, due to the prolonged dry spell (FEWSNET 08/2015). With the exception of the southern fishing region and San Salvador and La Libertad departments, which are less dependent on crops production, the rest of El Salvador's departments are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes, as a result of crop losses, lack of food reserves after two consecutive crop failures, and limited rural labour opportunities (FEWSNET 08/2015; FEWSNET 2010).

Guatemala: In the western highlands, households affected by coffee rust and below-average rainfall during the *primera* season are expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security outcomes until November. In the east, affected households that do not receive assistance are expected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) until October, and Stressed (IPC Phase 2) from October through December (FEWSNET 01/08/2015).

Honduras: Poor households in the most affected areas in Comayagua, Francisco Morazán, El Paraíso, Choluteca, Valle, and La Paz departments are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security outcomes, due to lack of food reserves, shortages of jobs, and seasonal rises in grain prices (FEWSNET 08/2015). 250,000 people across 12 departments are in immediate need of assistance (OCHA 14/09/2015). The remaining affected population are expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes from September through December (FEWSNET 08/2015).

Nicaragua: Poor households in northern Chinandega, western Estelí, northwestern Nueva Segovia, western Madriz, and Boaco and Carazo departments are expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food security outcomes by September (FEWSNET 08/2015). Poor households, including subsidence farmers, day labourers, and small coffee growers in northern and central areas are expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes between September and November (FEWSNET 08/2015).

Map of Drought in the Dry Corridor



Source: Climate Prediction Center 23/09/2015

Food Availability

El Salvador: 88,000 hectares of maize crops were affected during the *primera* season, with more than 60% lost in the affected areas. Of the 3,000 hectares planted to beans, more than 80% of the crops are forecast to be lost (FAO 14/09/2015). At least 102,000 farmers are estimated to be affected by either maize or bean loss (FAO 14/09/2015). The availability of seeds will be significantly reduced in the *postrera* season due to the losses in the *primera* season (FAO 14/09/2015). FAO forecasts an 18% reduction in maize production for 2015 compared to 2014, which implies 105,000 metric tons of additional imports to meet the population's food needs (FAO 14/09/2015).

Guatemala: An estimated 80% of *primera* crops have been lost, affecting 677,000 people (154,000 households) (FAO 14/09/2015). The total loss is estimated to be 55,000 metric tons of maize and 11,500 metric tons of beans (FAO 14/09/2015). Compared to last year, a 5% reduction in maize production is forecast. 70,000 more metric tons of imports than in 2014 are required to meet the population's food needs (FAO 14/09/2015).

Honduras: An estimated 644,000 people (161,000 households) have been affected by the crop losses – half of these families have lost all crops and are severely affected (FAO 14/09/2015). 60% of maize crops and 80% of bean crops are estimated to have been lost in the most affected areas (FAO 14/09/2015). The most affected areas are Comayagua, Francisco Morazan, El Paraíso, Choluteca, and La Paz departments (FEWSNET 08/2015). Compared to last year, FAO forecast a 13% reduction in maize production, which means 91,000 metric tons of additional imports to meet the population's food needs (FAO 14/09/2015).

Nicaragua: Carazo, Chinandega, Boaco, Estelí, Madriz, and Nueva Segovia are the most affected departments by the prolonged dry spell. The departments account for around 30% of Nicaragua's total production. Up to 50% of crops in these departments are estimated to be affected, while total loss of crops has been reported in some areas within the affected departments (FEWSNET 08/2015). FAO forecast that production will be similar to last year's reduced production. 85,000 metric tons of imports are required to meet the population's food needs (FAO 14/09/2015).

Food Access

Maize prices are above-average in all four countries due to the prolonged dry spell and the second consecutive year of adversely affected harvest. Compared to last year, maize prizes across the region are 14–20% higher than this time last year (FEWSNET 08/2015). Due to limited opportunities for seasonal work, crop losses, and seasonally high prices, poor households are struggling to afford food (FEWSNET 08/2015; FEWSNET 01/08/2015).

WASH

Water levels are reported to be below-average in drought-affected areas across Central America (Stratfor 02/09/2015; FEWSNET 01/08/2015; FEWSNET 08/2015). Adequate WASH facilities are already limited in rural areas, and are likely to be further limited as a result of the dry spell (El Diario de Hoy 17/09/2015; El Nuevo Diario 27/08/2015).

Dengue and chikungunya (both mosquito-borne viral diseases) are endemic in Central America, and concern has been raised that water shortages caused by the prolonged dry spell may lead to a spike in cases. The number of mosquitoes increase in drought conditions, as rivers dry up creating ideal breeding grounds. Increased temperatures also enhance the transmission risk of mosquito-borne diseases (UNICEF 14/09/2015). In El Salvador, cases of dengue have increased by 82% compared to this time last year (Diario El Mundo 25/09/2015).

Nutrition

In some communities, acute malnutrition rates for children under five have reached 13% (OCHA 07/09/2015).

El Salvador: The acute malnutrition rate is at 2%, and has increased due to the coffee rust epidemic and prolonged dry spell (WFP 30/06/2015). The chronic malnutrition rate is at 14%, a decrease from recent years (WFP 30/06/2015).

Guatemala: The prevalence of global acute malnutrition was found to be less than 5% in affected areas in a SMART survey conducted in March, however an increase in malnutrition rates is expected due to the prolonged dry spell (FEWSNET 01/08/2015). According to FAO, rates of chronic child malnutrition have increased (Reuters 14/09/2015). An estimated 3,000 children are at risk of acute malnutrition (OCHA 21/09/2015).

Honduras: In October 2014, 3.4% of children under five suffered from moderate acute malnutrition (WFP 31/10/2014). Rates of chronic malnutrition were measured at 23% among children under five in 2012 (WFP 30/06/2015). These numbers have likely increased following the prolonged dry spell and worsening food security situation (WFP 30/06/2015).

Nicaragua: According to government data, acute malnutrition rates have decreased since last year: from 11.9% in 2014 to 5.7% this year. Chronic malnutrition rates have also decreased from 24.4% in 2014 to 19% this year (GoN 17/09/2015).

Vulnerable Groups Affected

Poor households, including subsistence farmers, small coffee growers, and day labourers who are facing limited labour opportunities, are the most vulnerable to the prolonged dry spell.

Humanitarian and Operational Constraints

General insecurity, including drug trafficking and corruption, has hampered humanitarian operations in Honduras (WFP 30/06/2015).

In El Salvador, insecurity, in particular the presence of *Maras* (criminal groups), hampers the delivery of humanitarian assistance (WFP 30/06/2015).

Aggravating Factors

Coffee Rust

Central America has faced an epidemic of coffee rust (also known by its Spanish name *roya*), a fungus that attacks the leaves of coffee plants, since 2013. As a result, day labourers can no longer depend on seasonal labour opportunities in coffee production (Reuters 14/08/2015). The livelihoods of small coffee growers have also been affected (FEWSNET 08/2015). El Salvador and Guatemala are particularly affected by coffee rust, while outbreaks are reportedly less severe in Honduras and Nicaragua (Stratfor 02/09/2015). In El Salvador, the coffee harvest is forecast to be reduced by 35-40% compared to last year, as a result of coffee rust and drought conditions (Diario El Mundo 26/09/2015).

Floods

El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua are prone to flooding, and in the case of heavy rainfall drought-affected areas will be particularly vulnerable. Floods would exacerbate the food security situation in affected areas as a result of further crop damage or destruction.

Response Capacity

Local and National Response Capacity

The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua have distributed agricultural aid packages, including seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation pumps, to aid farmers' recovery during the *postrera* season (FAO 14/09/2015).

The government of Honduras declared a state of emergency in June, and is providing direct food assistance and production support to the affected population. The government has requested assistance from the international community (El Heraldo 20/09/2015).

The government of Nicaragua has begun food distributions to affected areas (GoN 02/09/2015).

International Response Capacity

FAO is supporting the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in order to improve resilience of agriculture, in addition to providing direct production assistance. WFP is working with the Guatemalan government to provide food assistance (FAO 14/09/2015).

As a result of the 2014 dry spell, WFP has been providing food assistance to 240,000 people in the dry corridor this year (WFP/FAO 11/08/2015).

Population Coping Mechanisms

The vast majority of affected households have resorted to negative coping mechanisms, including reducing frequency or portion sizes of meals (WFP 26/09/2015).

El Salvador: A majority of affected households have applied stress and crisis level coping mechanisms, including selling productive assets, spending their savings, and borrowing food (WFP 26/09/2015).

Guatemala: According to a SMART survey in March, 23% of households in the affected western region and 30% of households in affected eastern areas have resorted to negative coping mechanisms, including eating fewer meals per day (FEWSNET 01/08/2015; Reuters 14/09/2015).

Honduras: Coping mechanisms including selling livestock and eating seed stocks are frequently employed by the affected population (WFP 26/09/2015). Members of poor households in affected areas have migrated to urban areas or other countries to look for labour opportunities (FEWSNET 08/2015).

Nicaragua: Some communities in Madriz and Chinandega departments have dug wells on riverbanks to obtain water for livestock and household activities (FEWSNET 08/2015).

Lessons Learned

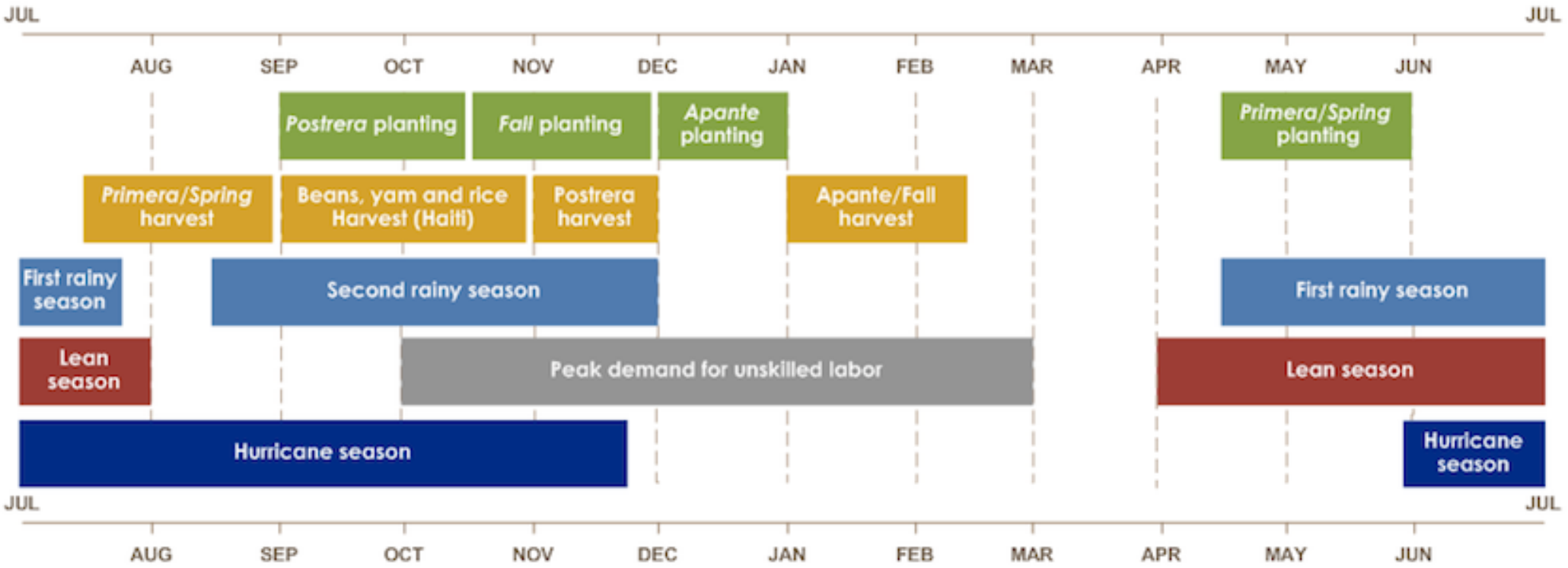
During the 2014 dry spell, assessments found that in 5% of households in El Salvador, 10% of households in Honduras, and 12% of households in Guatemala, one or more member had migrated, either from rural to urban areas or internationally, as a coping mechanism (Hunger Without Borders 17/09/2015). The Hunger Without Borders report found a correlation between food security and migration, and it can therefore be expected that migration will continue in the affected countries in 2015 (Hunger Without Borders 17/09/2015).

Key Characteristics

Key indicators	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
Total population (2014)	6,107,706	16,015,494	7,961,680	6,013,913
Capital (population 2011)	San Salvador (1,605,000)	Guatemala City (1,168,000)	Tegucigalpa (1,088,000)	Managua (970,000)
Population, female (% of total) (2014)	53%	51%	50%	51%
% population in rural areas (2014)	34%	49%	46%	42%
Access to electricity (% of population) (2012)	93.7%	78.5%	82.2%	77.9%
Improved water source (% of population with access) (2015)	94%	93%	91%	87%
Improved sanitation facilities (% of population with access) (2015)	75%	64%	83%	68%
Life expectancy at birth, female (years) (2013)	77.1	75.6	76.2	77.9
Life expectancy at birth, male (years) (2013)	67.8	68.5	71.5	71.8
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births) (2013)	69	140	120	100
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) (2015)	16.8	29.1	20.4	22.1
Prevalence of severe wasting, weight for height (% of children under 5)	0.5% (2008)	0.2% (2009)	0.3% (2012)	0.5% (2006)
Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)	87% (2013)	77% (2013)	86% (2013)	78% (2012)
Net migration rate (migrants per 1,000 population) (2015)	-8.3	-2.0	-1.2	-3.0
Unemployment (% of total labor force)	6.3%	2.8%	4.2%	7.2%

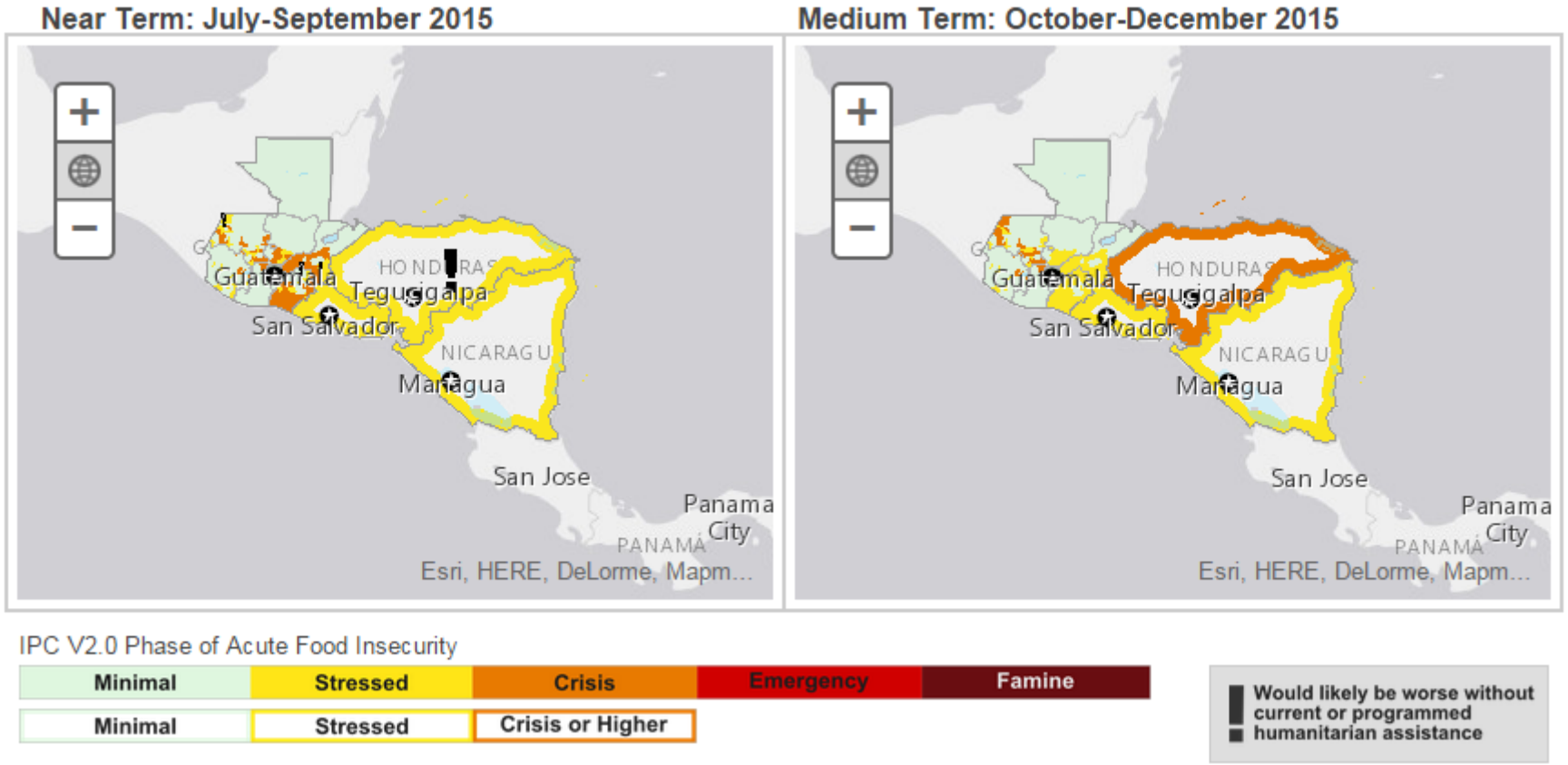
Sources: UN Data 2015, World Bank 2015, CIA Factbook 2015, UNICEF 2015

Central America Seasonal Calendar



Source: FEWSNET 2013

Map



Source: FEWSNET 08/2015