

Crisis (IPC Phase 3) continues in the southeastern and coastal marginal mixed farming areas

FEWS NET estimates that nearly one million people will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the southeastern and coastal marginal mixed farming livelihood zones between January and April. These areas are dependent on rainfed agriculture, and the October to December short rains season, on average, contributes over 65 percent of annual production. In some pockets, this season will be the fourth or fifth consecutive below-average season. Due to the poor start of season, poor distribution of the rains, and dry spells, some crops have already failed. Contracting incomes from below average casual labor availability and persistently high staple food prices are reducing food access. Assistance that supports food consumption and protects livelihoods will be necessary between now and April when short-cycle vegetables become available.

Early expectations of an above-average short rains season prompted farmers in the southeastern and coastal marginal lowlands to invest resources in land preparation, inputs, and planting from September to November. Contrary to those early expectations, the short rains were below average in total amounts, and they have been poorly spatially and temporally distributed with dry spells.

Following a dry spell in early October, planted seeds rotted or had low rates of germination. Only up to a five percent germination rate was realized. About a third of the households replanted, and the germination of the replanted crops was good. Normally by mid- to late December, the maize crop is at the tasseling stage, but this year crop development has been hindered. The maize crop is tasseling this year at a very early stage of growth. Yields will be significantly reduced. By the third week of December, some farmers were still replanting for the second and, in some cases, third time. However, a significant proportion of households, having exhausted their resources in the first planting, have not replanted. Even if the short rains continue well into January and February, with crops in their current conditions, the maize harvest may be only up to 20 percent of normal.

Below average national maize production this year in Kenya combined with high maize prices from exporting countries in the region, particularly Tanzania, are likely to keep maize prices well above average between now and the start of the long rains season in March. Casual labor wages are expected to be below average through March, especially due to less weeding and harvesting labor for the short rains crops, a key source of labor income. Some households will harvest the more drought-resistant crops such as sorghum and green grams by the end of January or early February, and around one in ten households have started to harvest early maturing vegetables. There has been little seasonal improvement of livestock productivity; body conditions are just fair. High prices, poor livestock productivity, and reduced income from labor will reduce food access between now and April.

By mid-December, households in Makueni, Kitui, and Taita Taveta District reported skipping meals. In Mwingi, households have abnormally restricted their dietary diversity, and many are substituting less preferred foods for maize. Nutrition is being supported by interventions. A significant proportion of households are still beneficiaries of assistance programs, which are playing a role in sustaining food consumption. Even with some limited crop recovery during [rains forecasted for early January](#), poor households will be unable to maintain minimally adequate food consumption between now and April when early maturing vegetables become available. Continued and expanded assistance could sustain food consumption and maintain nutritional status from January until April.

Figure 1. Stunted maize in Ukasi, Mwingi District, Eastern Province, December 2012



Source: FEWS NET