Nevertheless, crop failures and a consequent decrease in labour opportunities, combined with higher food prices, caused a worsening of acute food insecurity towards the end of the year (IPC, July 2019).

**FACTORS DRIVING ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY**

**Weather extremes**

Eswatini is still recovering from the 2015/16 El Niño-induced drought, which cost the country over SZL 3.8 billion (USD 264 million). As most of the food crop production is rain-fed and irrigation infrastructure remains unaffordable to smallholder farmers (KoE, December 2018), the rainfall deficits during a critical crop development phase in the 2018/19 cropping season caused localized shortfalls in food crop production in 2019, which underpinned the poor food security situation (FAO-GIEWS, October 2019).

Over one in four people reported having experienced a weather-related shock, such as drought, irregular rains or dry spells in 2019, rising to almost half of the population in Lubombo region (EVAC, July 2019).

The aggregate national cereal harvest in 2019 declined by about 16 percent compared to the previous year, with most crop failures concentrated in the eastern Lubombo and southern Shiselweni regions because of erratic rainfall. Cereal import requirements increased to 200,000 tonnes which is slightly above the average (FAO-GIEWS, October 2019). Comparing households’ harvests in 2019 with the previous year, about 46 percent reported to have harvested half of the previous season and around 9 percent had no harvest or experienced total crop failure (EVAC, July 2019).

Although the 2019 cereal harvest fostered a cyclical improvement in food security from June–September, reflecting a boost in food stocks and a seasonal increase in income-generating opportunities, these improvements were short-lived.

By October, the 25 percent of the rural population classified as in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) had depleted their food stocks earlier than normal and were engaged in crisis or emergency coping strategies, such as the sale of productive assets, to meet their essential food needs (IPC, July 2019).

**Economic shocks**

In mid-2019, casual labour opportunities were limited and by June unemployment in Lubombo region had increased to 29 percent and was expected to increase even further at the end of the year (IPC, July 2019). Nationally, unemployment was estimated at 28 percent (EHES, 2018). Over 80 percent of households in most areas experienced a loss of income. Only around 10 percent fully recovered from the shocks they experienced, which included loss of assets (EVAC, July 2019).