Out of this total number, an estimated 362,000 people were classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 71,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) meaning they needed urgent action to save lives and livelihoods. Approximately 553,000 people faced Stressed (IPC Phase 2) conditions and were in need of longer-term resilience-building and livelihood protection measures (IPC, July 2019).

Compared to the previous year’s acute food insecurity peak in December 2018, when 274,000 people needed urgent humanitarian food assistance, the number of people facing Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) conditions increased by 58 percent (IPC, November 2018).

**FACTORS DRIVING ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY**

**Weather extremes**

Lesotho experienced extreme rainfall deficits between October 2018 and January 2019 (FAO-GIEWS, December 2019). The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) at the beginning of February was about 60–90 percent below normal (FEWS NET, February 2019).

The area planted for maize for 2018/19 dropped nationwide and was significantly lower than the past four years (LVAC, July 2019). Maize production, which accounts for the bulk of the national cereal output, was estimated at about 35,000 tonnes, over 60 percent below the previous five-year average (FAO-GIEWS, December 2019). Compared with the previous year, 2018/19 maize production decreased by 73 percent, wheat by 61 percent and sorghum by 93 percent (LVAC, July 2019).

Although the overall availability of maize, the key food staple, remained stable as domestic supplies were buttressed by imports from South Africa, the harvest shortfalls led to food gaps for many rural households (LVAC, July 2019).

At the district level, there was a significant decrease in cereal production in southern Qacha’s Nek district (LVAC, July 2019), due to extreme rainfall deficits at the start of the cropping season. As a result of the steep production decline, almost 10 percent of the district’s population was classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) (IPC, July 2019).

Overall, 39 percent of households own livestock, rising to 60 percent in Mokhotlong, 59 percent in Thaba-Tseka and 51 percent in Mohale’s Hoek. Livestock deaths increased, attributed to lack of water and pasture as well as diseases. Households sold stock to buy food, pay for education and medical expenses (LVAC, July 2019).

**Economic shocks**

After two consecutive years of reduced crop production, households’ minimal food stocks made them more reliant on market supplies to meet their consumption needs. However,