Ampanihy and Beloha districts were classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), while Ambovombe and Tsihombe were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) only thanks to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Amboasary, Betioky and Bekily faced Crisis (IPC Phase 3) conditions and all the other districts analysed faced Stressed (IPC Phase 2) (IPC, October 2018).

With the beginning of the main harvest period, the food security situation improved from June when around 730,500 were classified in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) including 135,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in three districts of the Grand Sud. Food security further improved by July–October when no populations were classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and around 500,000 were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) (IPC, November 2019).

2 The number in need of urgent assistance started to increase again during the lean season from November, reaching 728,000 in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above), (IPC, November 2019).3

Factors Driving Acute Food Insecurity

Weather extremes

Rainfall deficits had a negative impact on rice and maize crops in late 2018 in south-western, eastern and extreme southern parts (FAO-GIEWS, January 2019). Western areas faced a decrease in local rice production because of well below-average rains, while in southern areas maize production was near zero following unevenly distributed rainfall, pest outbreaks and high costs of seeds (FEWS NET, April 2019).

Cyclones Desmond and Ekestang in early 2019 flooded maize and rice fields in south-western and middle-western areas (FEWS NET, January 2019), and cyclone Gelena brought above-average rainfalls in northern areas (FEWS NET, February 2019). Overall, the 2019 cereal production increased compared to the previous year and to the five-year average, with significant increases in rice production, which was 18 percent above 2018 levels and cassava production, which was 12 percent above.

However, significant production shortfalls were reported locally, such as in the Grand Sud where the region of Androy has experienced a significant drop in rice production over the past six years. In these areas, despite favourable rainfall compared to the previous year, agricultural production remained constrained by the lack of inputs resulting from previous failed agricultural campaigns (MAEP, FAO and WFP, etc.).

2 Humanitarian assistance was provided in Bekily, Beloha and to a lesser extent in Tsihombe between July and October.
3 October 2018 and November 2019 data are not comparable due to a different coverage of analysis. However, in the comparable areas, the number of acute food insecure in October 2019–March 2020 was lower than during the 2018 lean season.