
**Crop pests**

Fall armyworm infestations also contributed to the 2018/2019 maize production being 30 percent below the five-year average, including significant shortfalls in the southern and south-western areas (FEWS NET, October 2019). According to FAO estimates, the outbreak infested half of maize crops (FAO, December 2019), which discouraged farmers from planting (FAO-GIEWS, November 2019). Locust infestations affected rice and pulse crops in southern and central-southern areas (FEWS NET, July 2019), although to a lesser extent than in the previous decade.

**Economic shocks**

By January, households were highly dependent on markets during the lean season because of the low 2018 cereal output and early depletion of food stocks (FEWS NET, March 2019), particularly in the southern and south-eastern areas. Heavy rains following the cyclones affected supply routes to southern markets (FEWS NET, January 2019) where around four in five communes faced shortages of cassava. Rice prices were 14 percent above their year-earlier levels, maize prices were 39 percent higher, and cassava 50 percent higher. Daily wages were low and decreasing due to a limited demand for labour. Four in five vulnerable households in the south, and two in three in the south-east had to reduce their number of daily meals as a coping strategy until April–May (SISAV, February and April 2019).

In the post-harvest period in July–August, rice prices were still 10 percent above their year-earlier levels in Grand Sud (SISAV, August 2019). The lean season started earlier than usual – in October instead of December – because of reduced production in these areas and early depletion of households’ stocks (FEWS NET, September 2019).

More generally, a structural issue continued to constrain food security in 2019, as rice production was curtailed by lack of access to inputs and poor irrigation infrastructures (FAO-GIEWS, June 2019). For instance, poor southern farmers cropped only half of agricultural land in early 2019 because they could not afford to buy seeds and cuttings (FEWS NET, February 2019). Despite the rebound in rice production in 2019, a significant cereal deficit remained and cereal import requirements for 2019/2020 were forecast at 600,000 metric tonnes (FAO-GIEWS, November 2019). However, high prices of local and imported products affected households’ purchasing power due to the 10 percent depreciation of the local currency against the USD (FEWS NET, June 2019).