UGANDA | MAJOR FOOD CRISSES IN 2019

Weather extremes

In the north-eastern Karamoja region, the 2019 April–September rainy season did not fully establish until mid-May, substantially delaying planting. Torrential rains in June offset the moisture deficits, but hindered ploughing and sowing activities in some areas. Households were only able to retain limited amounts of cereal seeds from the poor 2018 harvest, which contributed to a decline in planted areas to below average levels. Average to above-average rains from June–September 2019 benefitted yields, but unseasonal precipitations in October and November disrupted cereal harvesting, drying and storage (FAO-GIEWS, January 2020). The harvest of sorghum, the main cereal grown in the area, was concluded in several areas in December with about two months of delay and production was estimated by FEWS NET at 20–30 percent below average. Late harvests, as well as a scarcity of seasonal income-generating opportunities, caused the lean season to be prolonged and more severe than usual, worsening food insecurity (FEWS NET, October 2019).

In bi-modal rainfall areas covering most of the country, the first half of the March–June rainy season was characterized by exceptional dryness, among the worst on record since 1982. The drought conditions, with cumulative rains between early March and the second dekad of April estimated at up to 80 percent below average, delayed planting and resulted in widespread germination failures and crop wilting.

Improved rains in late April allowed replanting of failed crops, but the planted area was below average as several farmers did not have enough seeds for replanting or opted to not plant as the rainy season was already too advanced. Above-average rains in May and June benefitted the establishment and development of late-planted and re-planted crops and allowed a partial crop recovery (FAO-GIEWS, August 2019). The output of the first season harvest was 10–15 percent below average, according to FEWS NET.