The government made it the only legal tender in June 2019, ending the multi-currency regime that was in place for over a decade, but the ZWL continued to fall in value.

In October, retail prices of maize meal were more than eight times higher than the previous year because of the weak currency, reduced domestic supplies following a drought-induced 2019 harvest and foreign exchange shortages that curtailed imports (FAO-GIEWS, December 2019).

In December, most markets, even in typical surplus production areas, were without maize grain, increasing demand for maize meal and further contributing to high maize meal prices (FEWS NET, December 2019).

The low cereal harvests in the 2018/2019 agricultural season depleted household incomes from agricultural-related activities, further compounding the effects of inflated food prices (FAO-GIEWS, October 2019).

While casual labour remained the main income for 30 percent of rural families, those relying on food crop sales reduced from 22 percent in 2018 to 8 percent in 2019. Cash shortages remained the most influential stressors experienced by households, followed by increases in cereal prices and drought, particularly in the provinces of Manicaland and Midlands (SADC, October 2019).

Weather extremes

In 2019, Zimbabwe experienced its worst drought in decades, with temperatures hitting 50 degrees Celsius in some areas (WFP, January 2020). The limited access to or non-existent irrigation facilities increased farmers’ vulnerability (WFP, December 2019).

The record-high temperatures in late October to early November affected water sources, agricultural activities and livestock. A high number of cattle deaths were reported in southern and western areas mainly due to livestock diseases (IPC, August 2019), but also to poor pasture conditions and water availability (FEWS NET, November 2019).

Cyclone Idai hit the country in March 2019 and affected around 270 000 people across nine districts in the eastern region as well as parts of southern Zimbabwe. The flooding and landslides that followed caused severe damages to crop and agriculture infrastructure (OCHA, August 2019).

Rainfall conditions were near to average from October–December 2019 despite late onset of rains countrywide and false starts in the southern and south-eastern parts of the country. Nevertheless, crop establishment was significantly affected (FEWS NET, October 2019).

At about 780 000 metric tonnes, Zimbabwe’s 2018/19 national maize production was over 40 percent below the five-year average (FAO-GIEWS, October 2019). The country’s