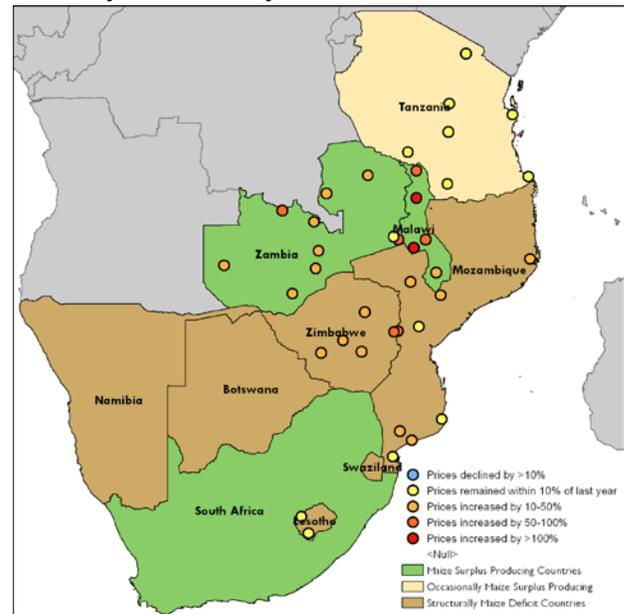


Tight cereal supplies and greater emergency food assistance needs expected

Drought in parts of southern Africa has reduced maize production and contributed to very high prices, resulting in pockets of acute food insecurity in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Although projected regional production is similar to last year and above the five-year average, a combination of lower surpluses and reduced carry-over stocks in surplus-producing countries means that less maize will be available for export within and outside the region this year. These tighter supplies, combined with persistent export demand from outside the region, will further increase prices over the 2013/14 consumption year. This situation could discourage private maize trade into deficit areas and complicate procurement efforts for humanitarian assistance within the region.

This year, maize harvests in South Africa – the region’s top surplus-producing country – are 5 percent lower than the five-year average and estimated maize export supplies are 32 percent lower than the five-year average. In Zambia and Malawi, exportable surpluses are 46 and 76 percent lower than the five-year average. Tanzania, the region’s second largest producer, is expected to have above-average harvests, but higher prices in the Horn of Africa may discourage private trade flows from Tanzania into southern Africa.

Figure 1. Change in Southern Africa maize prices between June 2012 and June 2013*



Source: FEWS NET

* Year-on-year price changes in local currency terms for maize grain, with the exception of Lesotho where prices are for maize meal.

Although the prices of maize and key substitutes in southern Africa will not reach the levels observed in the Horn of Africa, they will remain well above their respective 2011/12 and five-year average prices as the post-harvest period continues. Particularly high prices have been observed in Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe (Figure 1). As prices continue to rise, these increases are expected to be transmitted to deficit areas, including parts of Zimbabwe and Malawi. In parts of southern and central Zimbabwe, households are currently in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) due to poor production, reduced labor income, and high staple food prices. Households in some traditionally surplus-producing areas of northern and central Malawi are at Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity levels due to reduced food and cash crop production, and food prices that are nearly double last year’s levels. FEWS NET is also concerned about food security in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland, as these countries depend on cereal imports from South Africa. In Angola, the limited information available on the 2012/13 harvests indicates that this may be the second consecutive poor year.

Humanitarian assistance needs are expected to be above average this year. In Zimbabwe, an estimated 1.5 million people are projected to need food assistance between October and December, rising to 2.2 million people between January and March 2014. Humanitarian assistance through the Seasonal Targeted Assistance program is still in the planning stages, but is set to begin in October 2013. In Malawi, approximately 1.5 million people are likely to face food gaps this consumption year. Response planning is ongoing and resources are being mobilized. Despite tighter regional supplies, procurement for emergency food assistance programming is possible in South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia, although supplies may be lower than average in Zambia. In the coming months governments and the humanitarian community should plan for the expected above-average assistance needs and consider the limitations on local and regional procurement described above.