Rising prices and high food insecurity in the south

Key points:

- Despite the post-harvest period, households in the southern regions of Anosy and Androy continue to face high levels of food insecurity because of below-average maize crop production.

- Maize prices in the south increased or remained high in July, further eroding household purchasing power.

- Households in the south and those led by women are continuing to use high levels of food-related negative coping strategies.

Situation Update

Madagascar received mixed levels of rainfall during the 2015/16 cropping season (November/July). While most northern and central regions received fairly satisfactory seasonal rains, the south experienced severe dryness influenced by El Niño, causing crop failures and low production. As a result, households in Madagascar have faced significant food insecurity for the past few months (FAO GIEWS).

Between October 2016 and January 2017, food security is expected to deteriorate further as food prices rise and supplies become scarce during the peak lean season. Conditions are expected to worsen and pockets in the Androy region may be pushed into Emergency (IPC Phase 4). In central and northern areas, a near-average or above-average rice harvest and favourable cash crop prices will enable seasonally normal food access (FEWS NET).
Negative coping levels are still higher in the drought-affected southern regions of Androy and Anosy than in Analamanga. The eastern region of Atsinanana also has high negative coping levels (Figure 1). In Analamanga, the proportion of households using the five monitored negative food-related coping strategies increased significantly in July. Most notably, there was a 5 percentage point increase in the share of households resorting to the most severe coping strategy of reducing adult consumption to enable children to eat. The use of less severe strategies – limiting portion sizes and borrowing food or relying on help – also rose by 5 percentage points compared to June (Figure 2).

However, more surveyed households in Androy resorted to the negative coping strategies than in Analamanga. More than two thirds of respondent households in Androy borrowed food and relied on help from friends or relatives compared to less than half the households in Analamanga (Figure 3). Households led by women continue to resort to more negative food-related coping than those led by men (Figure 4).
Maize is more widely consumed in the southern regions whereas the more expensive rice is more widely consumed in the northern regions. In July, maize prices in Anosy increased by 29 percent and in Androy, they rose by 14 percent to MGA1600/kg. It seems that the below-average harvest is affecting the availability of maize, especially in the south. This will also likely mean an earlier start to the lean season. Rice prices in the less affected regions are mostly stable (Figure 5) at around MGA1400/kg.

The price of local rice in Analamanga and Atsinanana was MGA1400/kg in July – 6 percent higher than the national average in July 2014 but 4 percent lower than the four-year (2011–2014) national average. The price of imported rice in Atsinanana was 4 percent lower than the national average in July 2014, and 14 percent lower than the four-year national average (source: FAO GIEWS).

Purchasing power remained low in Androy and in Anosy, it fell for the third consecutive month. The decrease in purchasing power is mostly due to the increase in maize prices in drought-affected regions. Manual labour wages remained stable in all monitored regions at MGA3000 per day (Figure 6).
Poor harvest leads to concerns for food security

Respondents were asked an open-ended question to gauge their perception of food security in their communities. Similar to June, respondents attributed their food insecurity to the high food prices resulting from low rainfall and thus low crop production. Malnutrition and a lack of job opportunities continue to be problems. However, this month some respondents expressed more optimism about the upcoming cassava harvest.

Figure 7: Word cloud of responses from the south

Source: mVAM, July 2016

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