

JANUARY 2021



FOOD SECURITY UPDATE

Highlights

- All the 10 districts remain in phase 3 or worse of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) until March 2021.
- The country tightened COVID-19 restrictions by moving from purple to red colour stage on the Risk Determination and Mitigation Framework.
- Many households especially in urban areas continue to lose incomes during total lockdown.
- October to December received good rains conducive for agricultural activities.
- Planting started on time due to timely onset of the rains countrywide
- The water tables start to improve following dry spells.
- Normal rainfall conditions are expected in January to March 2021.
- Casual labour opportunities improved as agricultural activities took place in rural areas.
- Food prices remain high yet purchasing power is low for at least 40 percent of the population.
- Prices of staple were higher than previous year and five-year average.
- Majority of households had depleted their food stocks and food was mostly obtained through purchases.

COVID-19

By 20th January, Lesotho recorded 7,504 confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 which is 16.5 percent of tested people. This is an increase from 2,150 cases recorded on the 4th December 2020. The numbers increased significantly from December when migrants from South Africa came home for Christmas holidays.

- In line with the COVID-19 Risk Determination Framework, during the month of January 2021, the country moved from the purple colour stage which is associated with lower risk of infection transmission to red colour stage which is associated with high risk of infection, and community transmission is significant.
- In order to curb the spread of coronavirus, the country implemented total lockdown from 14th January and is expected to last for 14 days.
- Businesses such as liquor stores closed while transport industry, textile factories and others operated at reduced level; some people lost jobs and others are faced with reduced incomes.

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- Though Lesotho and South Africa has limited the movement between the border gates to essential services and this has affected the business operations.

Seasonal Outlook

- According to the Lesotho Meteorological Services (LMS), there is high likelihood of normal to above normal rainfall for the period January to March 2021. However, dry spells are expected between the good rains.
- Normal temperatures with high chances of above average temperatures are anticipated during the same period.

Weather Conditions and Rainfall

- Lesotho Meteorological Services indicated the period of October to December 2020 was characterized by normal to above normal rainfall distributed throughout the country.
- In the months of November and December 2020, most parts of the country ranged from wet to extremely wet (**figure 1** and **figure 2**).
- Remote sensing data by the World Food Programme dataviz indicated that across the country the vegetation index, normally used to measure the vegetation cover was above normal from November to December 2020 compared to the months in 2019 when vegetation index was below normal - **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**.
- In November and December some areas especially, the lowlands received severe hailstorm that damaged the crops.

Figure 1: Drought index in November 2020

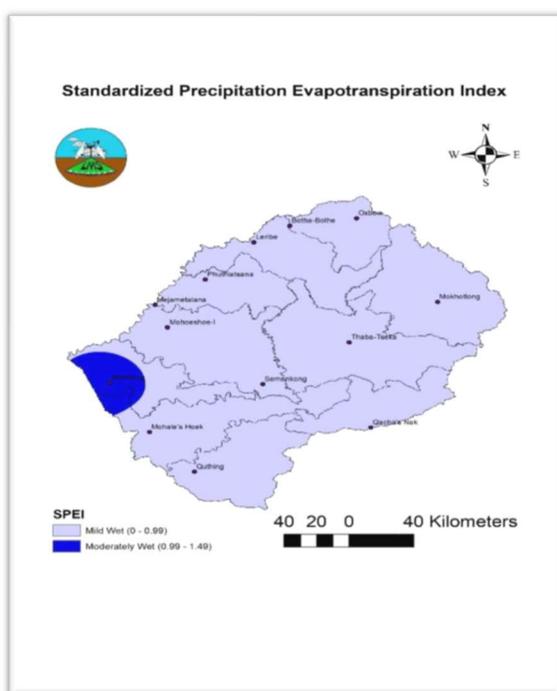


Figure 2: Drought index December 2020

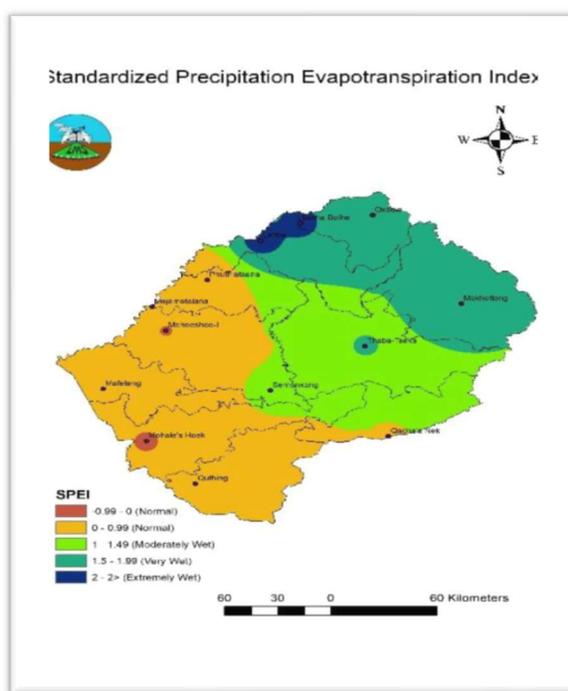


Figure 3: NDVI 2020

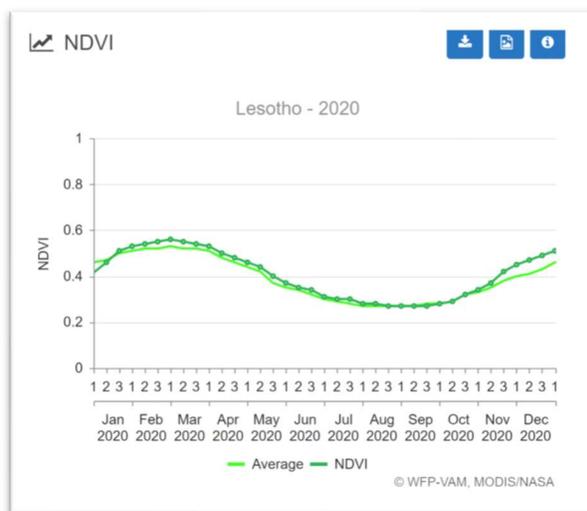
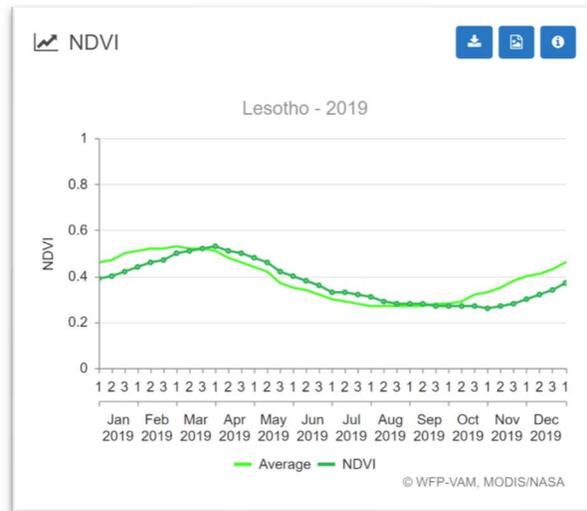


Figure 4: NDVI 2019



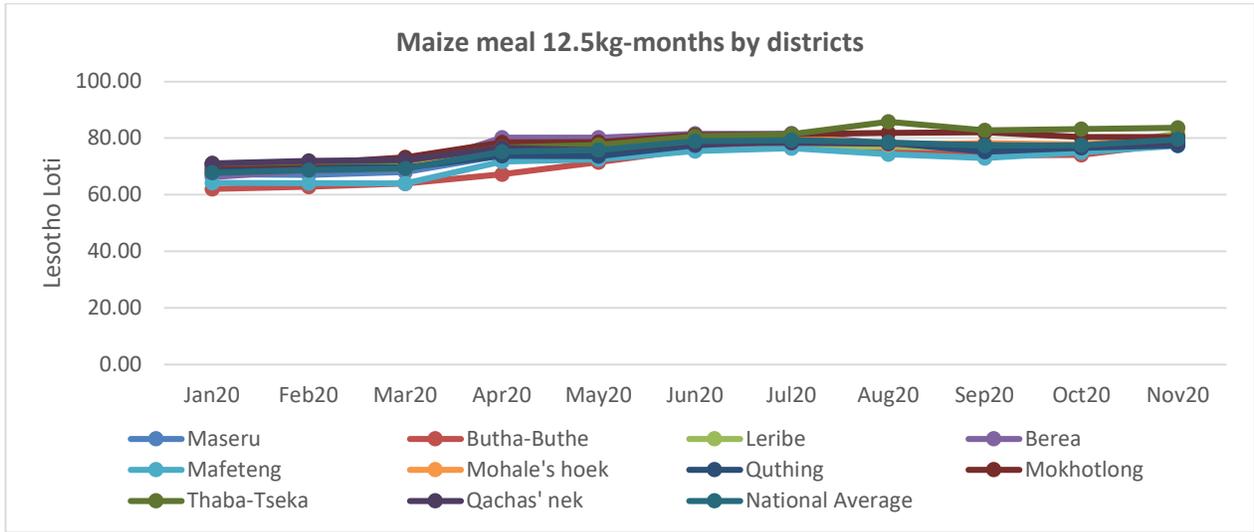
Livelihoods

- ✓ **Agricultural activities:** farming households in the highlands and lowlands planted on time due to timely onset of rains.
- ✓ The Government subsidized agricultural inputs and operational costs by 50 and 60 percent respectively. However, during planting, farmers were not able to access fertilizers.
- ✓ **Agricultural labour:** agricultural casual labour opportunities are expected to improve as farmers have cultivated their fields.
- ✓ **Remittances:** closure of borders made it difficult for migrant workers to return to South Africa after coming home for Christmas holidays. Noticeable number of the migrant tested positive for COVID-19 and were not allowed access into South Africa. This will have negative implications for some of households that depend on remittances.
- ✓ **Employment:** Due to total lockdown and reduced economic activities for two weeks, some households lost their income opportunities. Factory workers and some businesses work in shifts and reduced hours, street vendors are completely restricted, and transport business operates with reduced number of passengers.

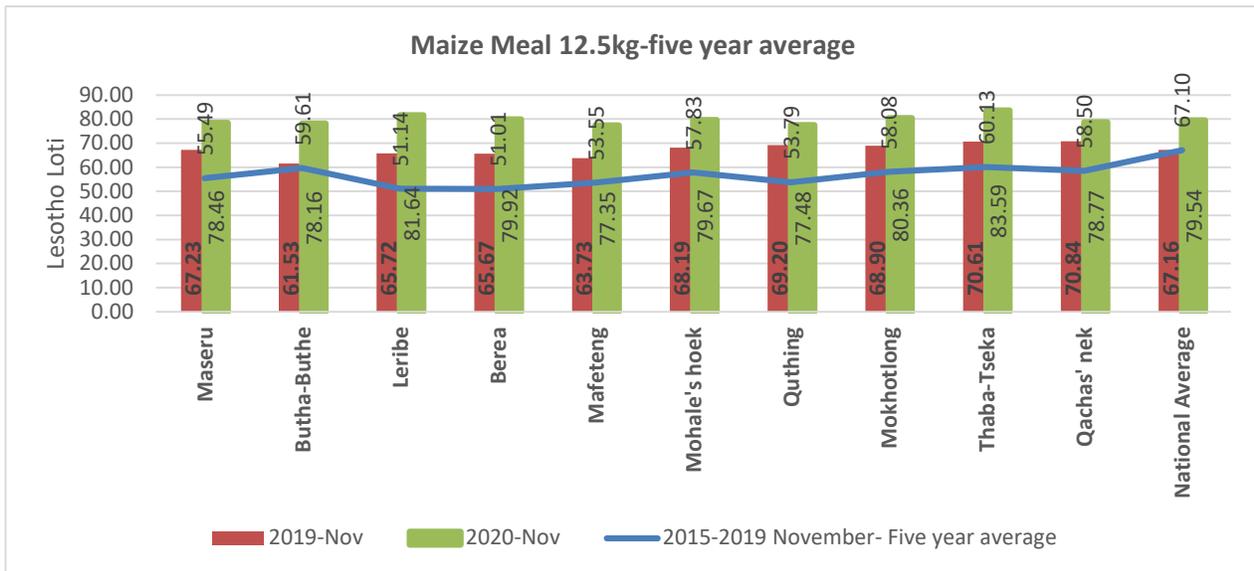
Food Access

- ✓ Due to poor harvest last year, majority of households depleted their food stocks and obtain most of staple food through purchases.
- ✓ Prices of staple remain high but stable to November 2020 - **Figure 5 (Bureau of Statistics - BOS)**.
- ✓ The month of November 2020 recorded 18 percent increase in the price of maize meal compared to the same period the previous year, with a range of 11-27 percent varying by districts.
- ✓ When compared to five-year average, prices were 40 percent higher - **Figure 6**.
- ✓ According to WFP Alert Price Spikes, maize meal prices are projected to remain high with increases varying by districts until May 2021.

**Figure 5: Prices of maize meal January-November 2020
(BOS, November 2020)**



**Figure 6: Prices of maize meal five-year average 2015-2019 August
(BOS, August 2020)**



- **Inflation:** In November 2020, annual inflation was 5.6 percent and higher than previous year in the same period - Figure 7.
- Food inflation rate increased from 5.2 percent in March to 13.5 percent in November and 6.3 points higher than November 2019- Figure 8

Figure 7- Annual inflation rates (BOS, November 2020)

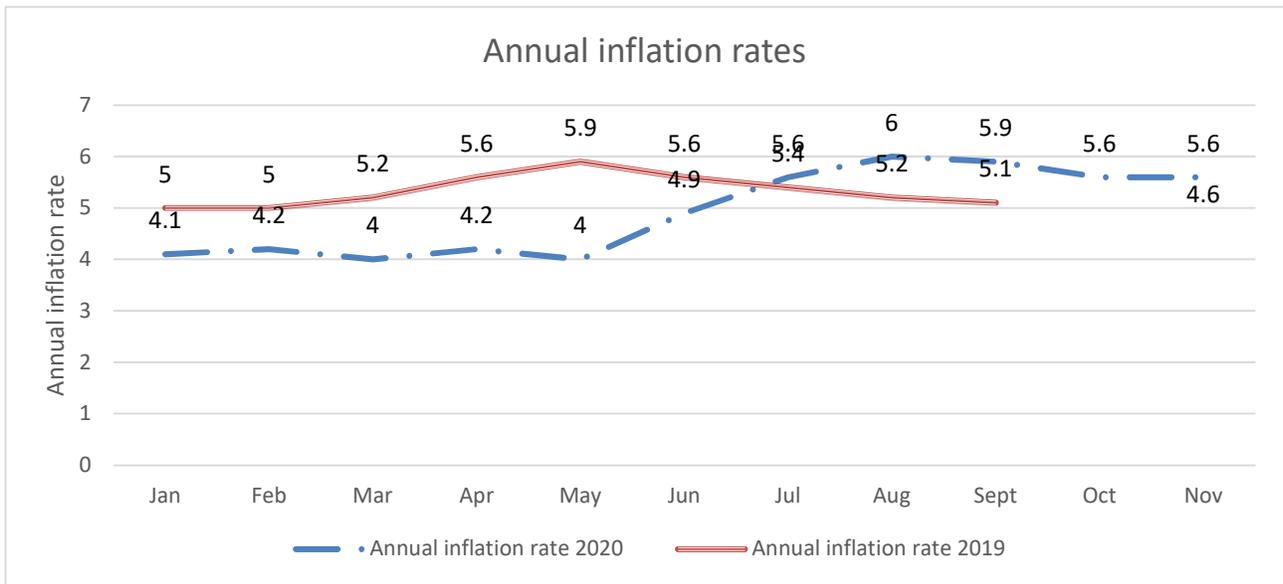
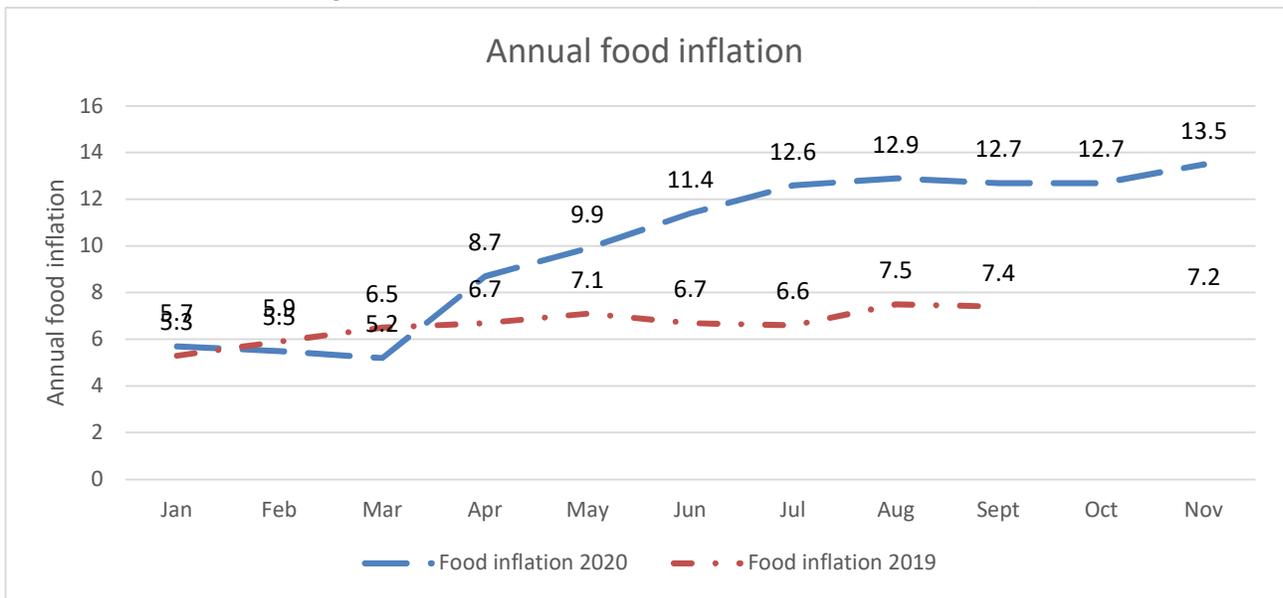


Figure 8- inflation food inflation rates (BOS, November 2020)



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