

February 2021

FOOD SECURITY UPDATE



source, DMA Mokhotlong

Highlights

- The country received heavy rains in January that caused loss of lives, animal death, destroyed crops and infrastructure.
- At least 54 foot bridges were destroyed, thus cutting access to services such as health services at the time of COVID-19 and for pregnant women, young children, and people on chronic medication.
- The Government moved the country from red to orange colour stage on the COVID-19 Risk Determination and Mitigation Framework, and this allowed some economic activities to occur.
- Household purchasing power continued to be undermined by loss of incomes especially in urban areas due to limited business operations following COVID-19 induced total lockdown.
- All the 10 districts remained in phase 3 or worse of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) until March 2021.
- Due to poor harvest in 2020, majority of households had depleted their food stocks and obtained most of their food through purchases.
- Food prices remained high making it hard for many households to meet their needs due to reduced incomes especially during total lockdown.

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COVID-19

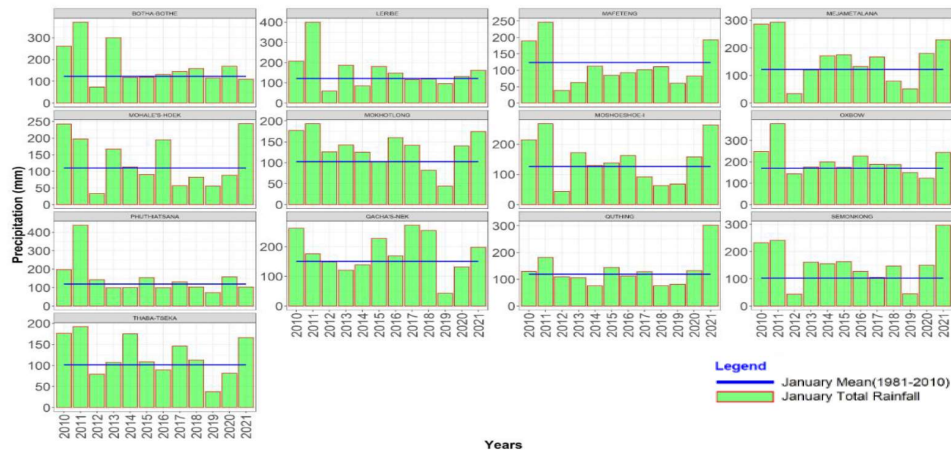
- The Government implemented total lockdown on the 20th January 2021 when the number of positive cases reached 7,504, which was $\pm 40\%$ increase from December record of 3,094, and positivity rate was at 47%.
- Although February recorded cumulative figure of 10,491 cases (17.3% of tested people), the positivity rate decreased to about 30% following 21-day total lockdown.
- The lockdown was therefore uplifted from red to orange colour stage of the COVID-19 Risk Determination Framework, which opened for some social and economic activities to take place while observing COVID-19 regulations.
- In mid-February South Africa opened some border gates with a pre-requisite of a negative COVID-19 certificate in order to cross the border.
- On the last day of February 2021, the Prime Minister made an announcement moving the country to purple colour on the COVID-19 Risk Determination Framework starting 1st March 2021. This is based on decline in the number of cases recorded daily. Under Purple colour stage, social and economic activities are more viable than in orange colour stage. Movement between Lesotho and South Africa is still limited to businesses, workers and students with permits and people with exceptional needs who will be approved by the Minister of Health. Schools are allowed to open with attendance based on rotational basis.

Seasonal Outlook and Rainfall Performance

- According to the Lesotho Meteorological Services (LMS), there is high likelihood of normal to above normal rainfall up to March 2021.
- Normal temperatures with high chances of above average temperatures are anticipated during the same period.
- LMS indicated that the country received heavy rains that fell between December and January and intensified on the 27-28 of January, although they were more concentrated in the southern part.
- The monthly rainfall was significantly above the mean (long term average 1981-2010) in most parts of the country. The heavy rains experienced in January led to hazardous weather condition. According to LMS, the month of January 2021 recorded the highest monthly totals in most parts of the country especially on the 27-28th. January 2021 marks one of the months in years that recorded high amounts of rains (Figure 1).
- On the other hand, the main water dams gained from these heavy rains. According to the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), Katse dam was 77.17% full compared to 59.67% from January record, while Mohale Dam was 40.64% full, an increase from 34.09% recorded in January.
- Metolong dam was 82.63% full on 01 December 2020 and on 01 February /21 it was at 101.31%



Figure 1: January annual rainfall amounts from 2010 to 2021 for 13 major weather stations

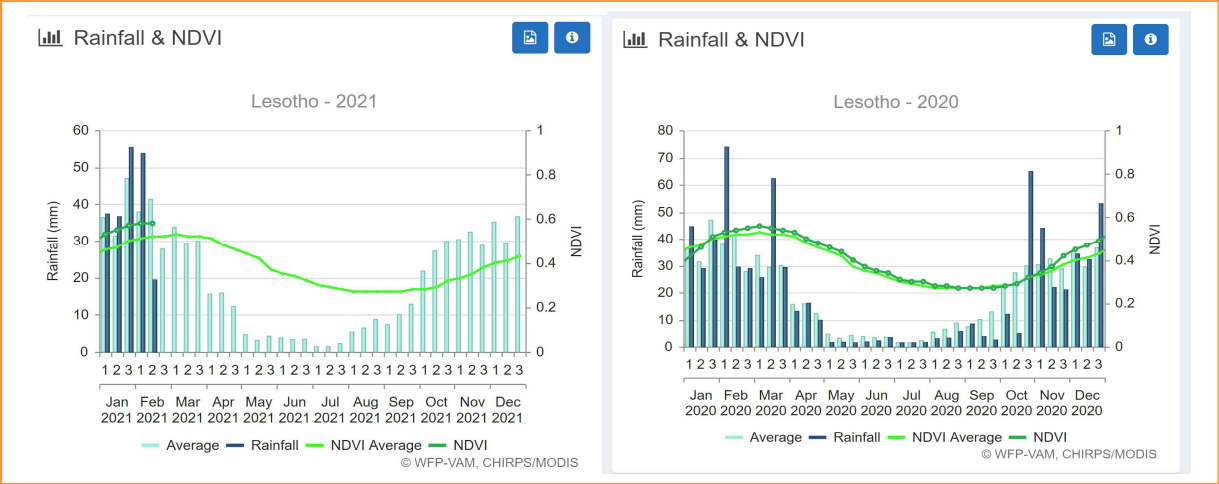


Source: Lesotho Meteorological Services, January 2021

- According to the World Food Programme remote sensing dataviz, the vegetation index which is normally used to measure the vegetation cover was above normal for the months of January and February 2021 (above normal) compared to the same months in 2020- figure 2 and figure 3.

Figure 2: NDVI 2021

Figure 3: NDVI 2020



Water and Sanitation

- According to the DMA rapid assessment, cases of turbid water were reported countrywide. In some areas most people used alternative water sources which were far from their homes, while others used alternative unprotected sources.
- Toilet spillage was reported in some districts such as Maseru, Butha-Buthe and Mohale's Hoek and is likely to cause disease outbreak especially for those that resorted to using alternative unprotected sources of water.
- Water is mostly collected by women and children and are likely to face challenges of being harassed while collecting water from areas that are distant.

Livelihoods

- The heavy rains that fell on the 27-28 of January impacted negatively on some livelihoods.
- According to the rapid assessment of the Disaster Management Authority that was conducted February, the rains caused some damage to the agricultural-based livelihoods. This worsened livelihood base that was already weakened by COVID-19.
- **Livestock:** the assessment indicated that over 3000 animals mostly sheep, goats and cattle died due to the heavy rains. Coupled with reduced or loss of incomes by many households following COVID-19, farmers sell their animals at low prices and this implies loss of income for households that rely on sales of livestock and its products.
- **Agricultural activities:** the assessment further indicated that at least 60 to 80% of area was planted following timely onset of the rains. However, about 10 to 50% of area planted close to the rivers was damaged by flash floods, water logging and soil erosion with the southern districts recording higher proportion of damage.
- Although some maize crop was still at vegetation stage, most crops ranged from tasseling to grain filling stages, and good crop stand was observed in many areas especially in the northern districts.
- Wheat which was supposed to have been harvested in the lowlands starting from December started sprouting in some areas. Other crops such as beans and sorghum were also negatively affected.
- **Agricultural labour:** weeding was disrupted by the heavy rains and waterlogging. Most poor households lost food and incomes from this livelihood source.
- The South African Weekly Viewpoint (23 February 2021) indicated that the Free State, Kwazulu Natal are among the provinces that normally employ seasonal workers in the farms around this time, but this has been discouraged in order to implement social distancing measures. Therefore, the seasonal labour that normally Basotho engage in South African farms has been reduced by covid-19.
- Production of pepper and tomato was good and because of this, the Government prohibited imports of these commodities to support local market.
- **Employment:** due to total lockdown, households either lost their incomes or experienced some reductions as most of the economic activities to shut or reduced operations. The textile factories

which employed mostly women introduced day and night shifts. This had resulted in the workers earning less than half of what they normally earn.

- **Remittances:** Low wages for textile workers implies a reduction in remittances for rural households. The re-opening of South African borders made it possible for more migrant workers to return to South Africa. However, the work permit or Lesotho special permits became a pre-requisite to receive the cleared COVID-19 certificate. Majority of migrant workers are without these permits hence some households are not receiving the remittances.

Food Access

- Due to poor harvest last year, majority of households depleted their food stocks and obtain most of staple food through purchases.
- Green consumption was observed in many areas.
- Prices of staple remain high since April 2020 - Figure 4 (Bureau of Statistics - BOS). The month of January 2021 recorded 20% increase in the price of maize meal compared to the same period last year, with a range of 14-26% varying by districts. These increases were also noted in the prices offered by the milling companies.
- According to WFP Alert Price Spikes, maize meal prices are projected to remain high with increases varying by districts until June 2021.

Figure 4: Prices of maize meal January 2020 – January 2021, (BOS, January 2021)

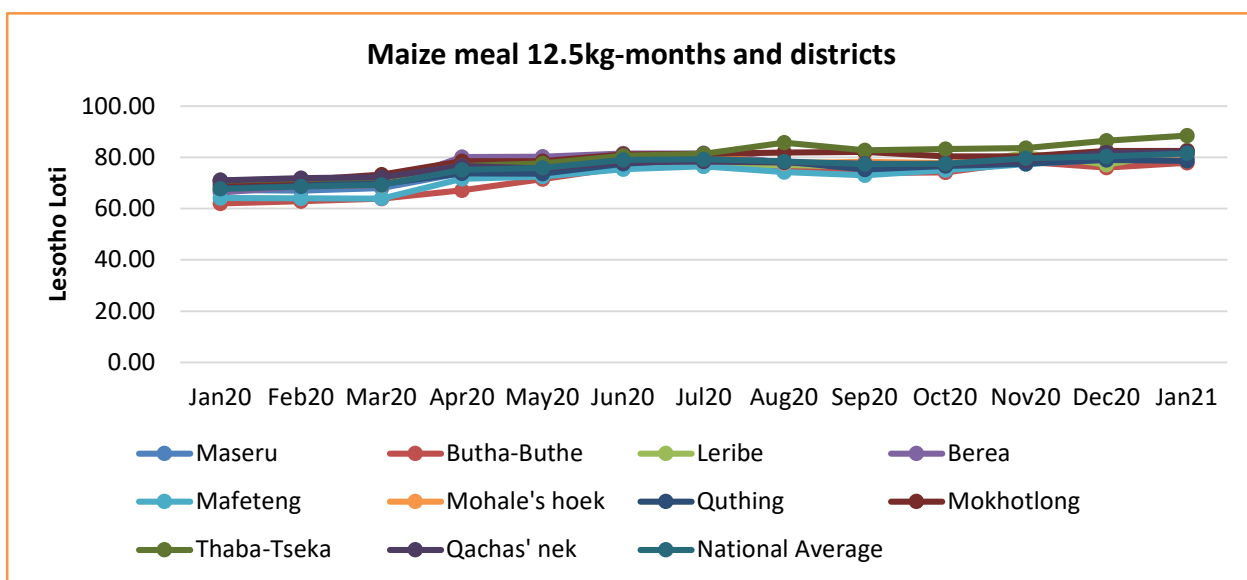
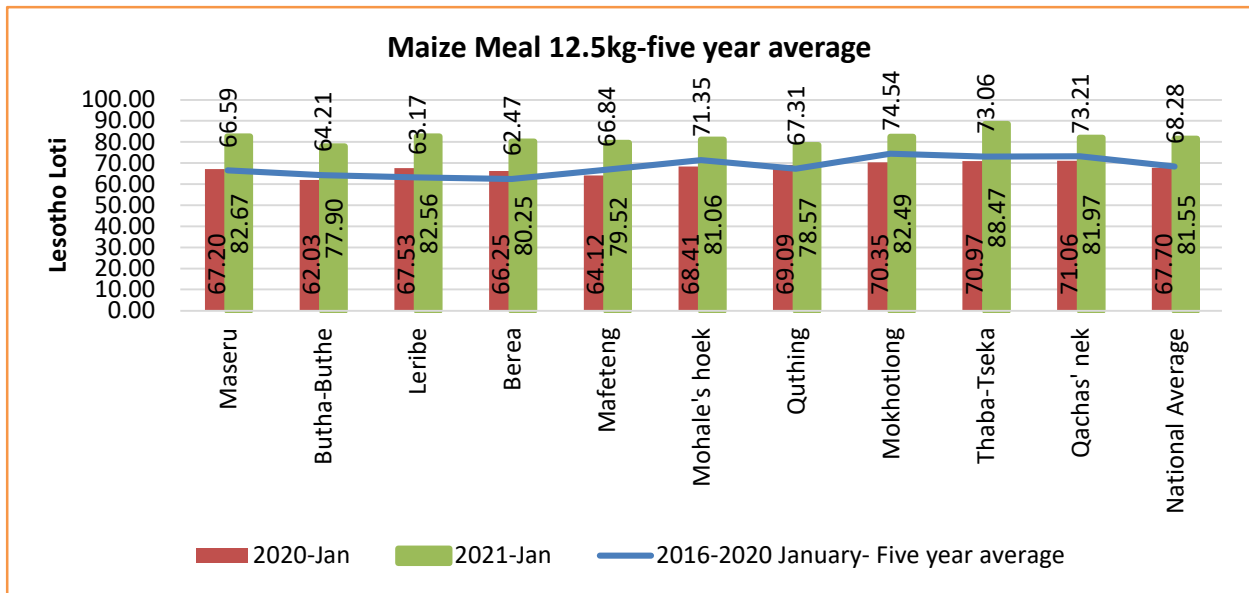
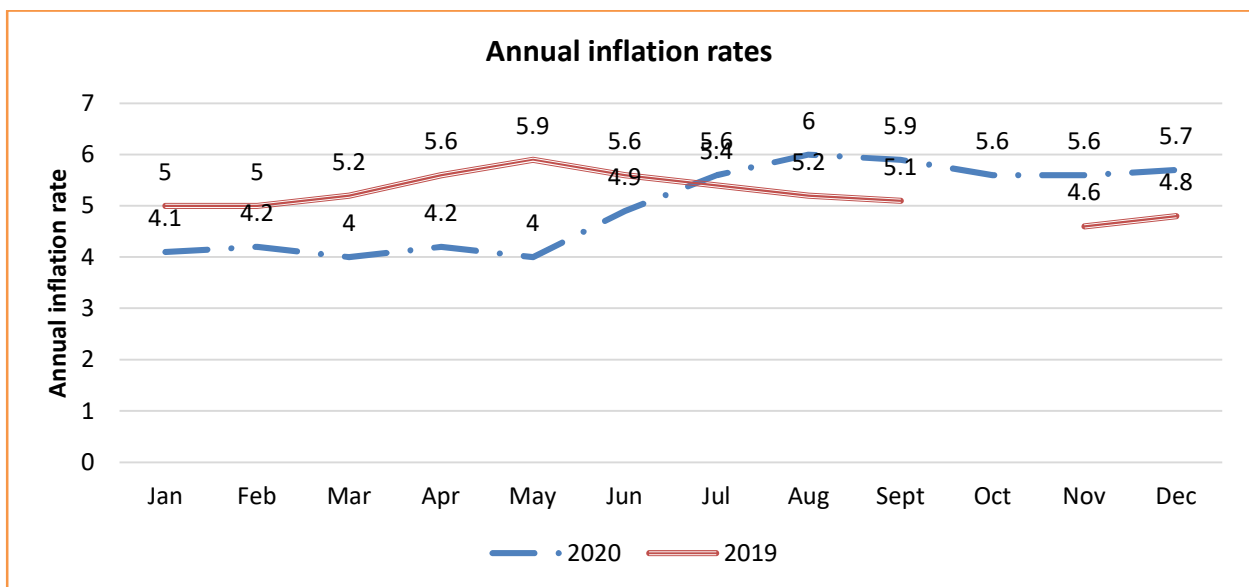


Figure 5: Prices of maize meal five-year average 2016-2020 August (BOS, January 2021)



- **Inflation:** In December 2020, annual inflation was 5.7% and higher than previous year in the same period - Figure 6. The annual inflation remained higher than the previous year since July 2020.

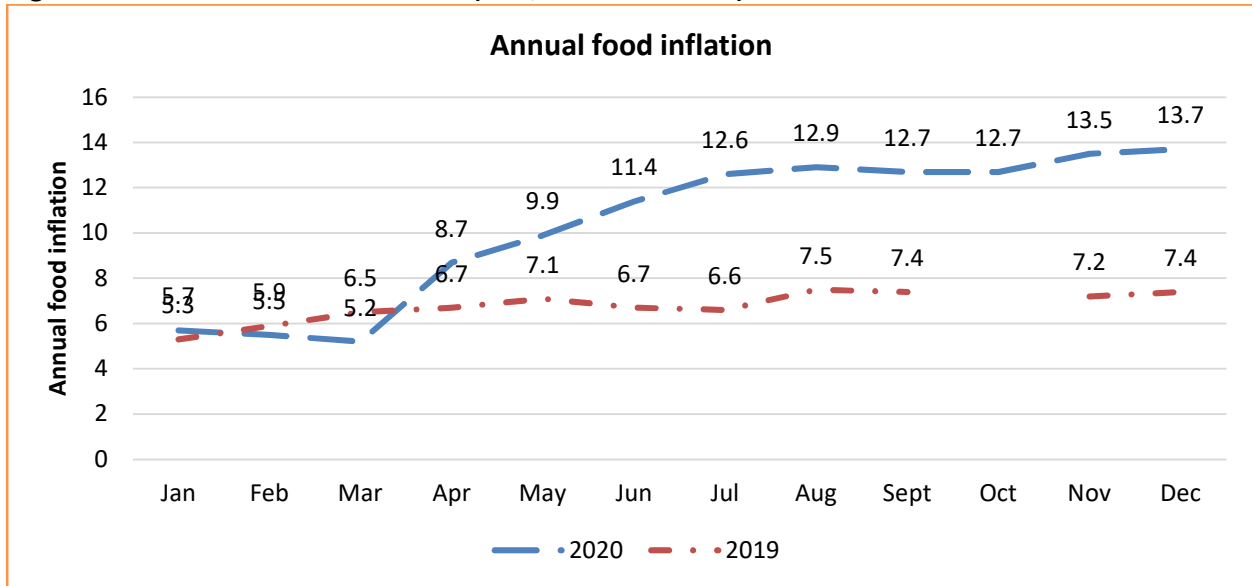
Figure 6- Annual inflation rates (BOS, December 2020)



- Food inflation rate increased from 5.2% in March to 13.7% in December 2020 and was 6.3 points higher than December 2019- Figure 7.

- This significant increase in food inflation was noted since April 2020 when Lesotho and South Africa implemented total lockdowns. It continued to increase and towards end of the year it had double compared to December 2019.

Figure 7- inflation food inflation rates (BOS, December 2020)



Ongoing Safety nets

Approximately 311,000 people from 83,000 households benefited food assistance interventions from different players, while 900 households benefited from agricultural support.

- At least 4200 households that host 16,800 beneficiaries received support through resilience activities in the southern districts of Lesotho: Mohale's Hoek, Quthing. Assistance was provided by the World Food Programme and UNDP.
- About 7310 households hosting 29,240 beneficiaries received crisis response food assistance from WFP and Lesotho Red Cross (LRCS) in Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka. DMA also provided food to 436 street vendors in Butha-Buthe.
- Through FAO, LENAUFU and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 400 farmers received 16 bags of 25kgs of potato seeds and 6 bags of 50kgs of fertilizer. Support was extended to Potato Lesotho Farmers Association (PLA) in Maseru and Mafeteng.
- The Ministry of Social Development provided Child Grant assistance to 49,366 households that host 118,000 children. Through Public Assistance, 12,740 people also received support.
- The Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office provided vegetable seeds to about 500 households in Butha-Buthe.
- The Government through the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation (MFRSC) engaged approximately 8988 people Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) activities.

	Male	Female	Total Households	Transfer value	Agency
Butha-Buthe	-	-	500	Vegetable seeds (rape, mustard, onion, spinach, beetroot, carrots)	FNCO
	-	-	436	10kg maize meal and 5kg beans	DMA
Leribe					
Berea					
Maseru	-	-	300	400kg seeds and 300kg fertilizer	FAO, LENAUFU and MOAFS
Mafeteng	-	-	100	400kg seeds and 300kg fertilizer	FAO, LENAUFU and MOAFS
Mohale's Hoek	453	937	1390*	M1200	WFP- IACOV
	554	1668	2222*	M1200	UNDP
Quthing	290	298	588*	M1200	WFP - IACOV
Qacha's Nek					
Mokhotlong	1946	1204	3150**	M811	WFP
	-	-	660**	M755***	LRCS
Thaba-Tseka	1664	1837	3501**	M811	WFP
Child Grant Programme (countrywide)			49,366 HHs hosting 118,000 children	M350 quarterly if children are 1-2 in HHs, M600 for children up to 3 (regular); M1500 top-ups	Ministry of Social Development
Public assistance (countrywide)			12,740 individuals	M750 quarterly (regular) M870 top-ups	Ministry of Social Development
Integrated Watershed Management			8988	M1200	MFRSC

*Resilience/adaptation

**Crisis response

*** M151 per person up to 5 household members

Local purchase by the Government of Lesotho

- The office of The Prime Minister launched local purchase of maize and beans in December 2020 with the intention of procuring Basotho produce and in turn distribute it to vulnerable households to address issues of food insecurity in the country.
- Through the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and Food Management Unit (FMU), at least 123.75 mt of beans and 245.45 mt of maize have been procured to date. Out of these, 97.06 mt and 194.12 mt of beans and maize respectively have been distributed across all the ten districts.
- This initiative is still ongoing.

District	Commodity Amount Purchased – 50Kgs		Distributed to Beneficiaries (Maize meal 12.5kg and Beans 5Kg)
	Beans	Maize	
Maseru	103	4017	6750
Mafeteng	374	30	2000
Mohale's Hoek	61	31	997
Quthing	283	103	545
Qacha's Nek	-	-	770
Thaba-Tseka	101	72	750
Mokhotlong	-	-	950
Butha-Buthe	-	-	450
Leribe	1469	131	3700
Berea	84	525	2500
Total KGs Purchase	123750	245450	
Total Mt Purchase	123.75	245.45	
Total Kg distributed	97060	194120	
Total MT distributed	97.06	194.12	

Source: Food Management Unit

Ongoing Safety nets



**Food assistance to
vulnerable households**

WFP crisis response



**Support to Potato
Lesotho Farmers
Association (PLA)**

FAO, LENAFA and Ministry of Agriculture