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EAST AFRICA Food Security Alert

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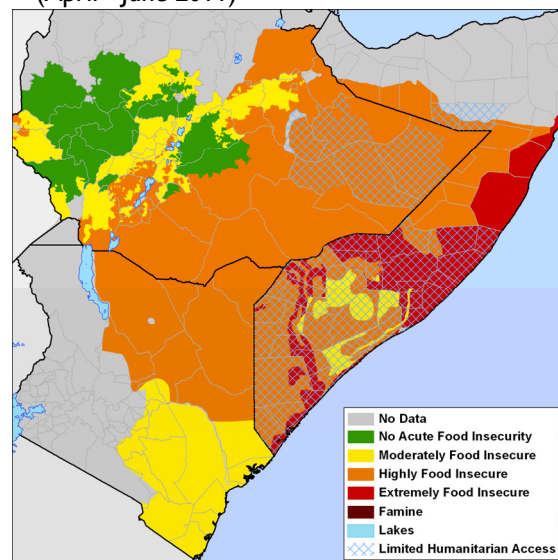
Below-average March to May rains forecast in the Eastern Horn – current crisis likely to worsen

In the eastern Horn of Africa, households in pastoral and marginal cropping areas currently face moderate to extreme levels of food insecurity due to an ongoing drought, deteriorating purchasing power, and, in some areas, limits on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Based on the findings of a multi-agency scenario building process, the likely poor performance of March-May rainfall is expected to result in further deterioration in food security (Figures 1 and 2). Even if March-May rains are average, food security in the region's eastern sector is expected to remain critical through at least May/June 2011. Large-scale emergency assistance to address current and likely food insecurity is needed; additional contingency planning, given the possibility of a major crisis, should also be implemented.

Following two seasons of average to above-average rainfall in most areas, the 2010 October-December rains were extremely poor – by some measures the worst in thirty years – across the region's eastern sector. January/February harvests completely failed in most cropping areas. In pastoral areas, poor rainfall has severely limited both livestock conceptions and pasture/water availability. Though food is generally available in the region, February retail prices for red sorghum in Baidoa, Somalia, rice in Gode, Ethiopia, and maize in Mandera, Kenya are 130 percent, 30 percent, and 28 percent above February 2010 prices, respectively, and are generally higher than 2008 food-price crisis levels. Prices are expected to continue rising through at least June/July 2011. Household purchasing power has declined across these same drought-affected areas as reductions in cattle prices and wages and extremely high water prices have exacerbated the impact of increased food prices. Poor households in most pastoral and marginal cropping areas currently face difficulty in meeting basic food and water survival needs, and levels of acute malnutrition are above emergency thresholds and increasing in many areas.

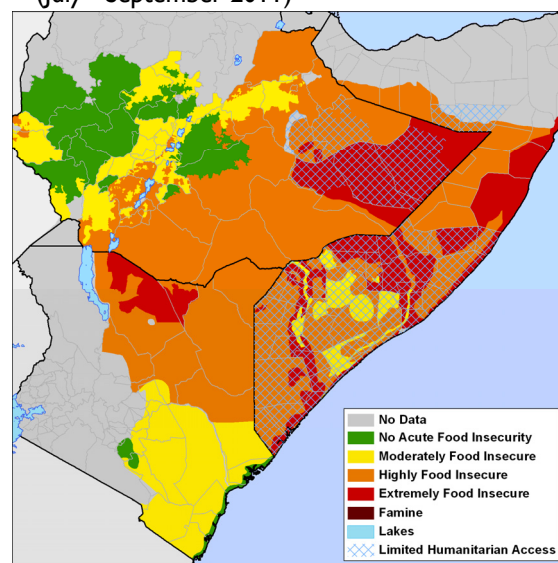
While uncertainty persists regarding the current La Niña and its potential impacts on March-May rainfall, other climate factors suggest an increased likelihood of below-average and poorly distributed rainfall in the eastern Horn during the March-May season. Based on an analysis of global, regional, and national forecasts, the current most-likely scenario assumes that rainfall totals will be 60-80 percent of average across much of the region's eastern sector. Because the distribution of rainfall is expected to be poor, "effective" rainfall — the quantity beneficial for pasture and crop production — is likely to be even lower. In combination with already reduced purchasing power, below-normal livestock holdings, and very limited milk availability, this poor seasonal performance is likely to drive further deterioration in food security and an increase in the population in need of both livelihood support and lifesaving emergency assistance

Figure 1. Most-likely food security outcomes (April - June 2011)



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Most-likely food security outcomes (July - September 2011)



Source: FEWS NET

Note: These maps depict projected food security outcomes in areas covered by a multi-agency scenario building initiative conducted during Feb/Mar 2011. No assumptions related to food security outcomes in areas classified as "No Data" should be drawn from these maps.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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between April and September 2011 in southern Ethiopia, southern/central Somalia, and northern/eastern Kenya. During the coming six months, the most severe household food insecurity in cropping areas is expected in April, May, and June, during the lead-up to the June/July harvest. In pastoral areas, below-average rains will result in temporary improvements in pasture, water availability, and animal body conditions between April and June, but food security would be expected to deteriorate again during the July-September dry season. Harvests in high potential cropping areas of the Kenyan highlands and western Ethiopia are not currently considered at-risk.

In the worst case scenario, rains would be less than 50 percent of average. Substantial crop failure and massive livestock mortality would occur, resulting in an expansion of extreme food insecurity across much of the region. **In marginal cropping areas of Juba and Hiran (southern Somalia), where humanitarian access is constrained, and the median GAM prevalence had already exceeded 25 percent as of December 2010, localized famine conditions, including significantly increased child mortality, are possible if the worst case scenario assumptions are realized.** Even if March-May rains are average, food security in the region is not expected to improve until at least May/June 2011.

Current assistance programs are inadequate to mitigate existing and expected food deficits and malnutrition. Expanded multi-sectoral programming should be implemented to address current and expected food insecurity. The development of new strategies to reach affected households in restricted areas is especially critical. In addition, large-scale contingency/response planning should begin immediately given that a failure of the March-May rains would result in a major crisis. FEWS NET and its partners will release more specific country-level alerts in the coming days and an updated seasonal forecast in mid-April. In addition, dekadal FEWS NET rain watches for Somalia and the East Africa Region will begin in late March, providing information on seasonal performance.