

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues periodic emergency alerts when a significant food security crisis is occurring, where portions of the population are now, or will soon become, extremely food insecure and face imminent famine. Decision makers should give the highest priority to responding to the situations highlighted by this Emergency alert.

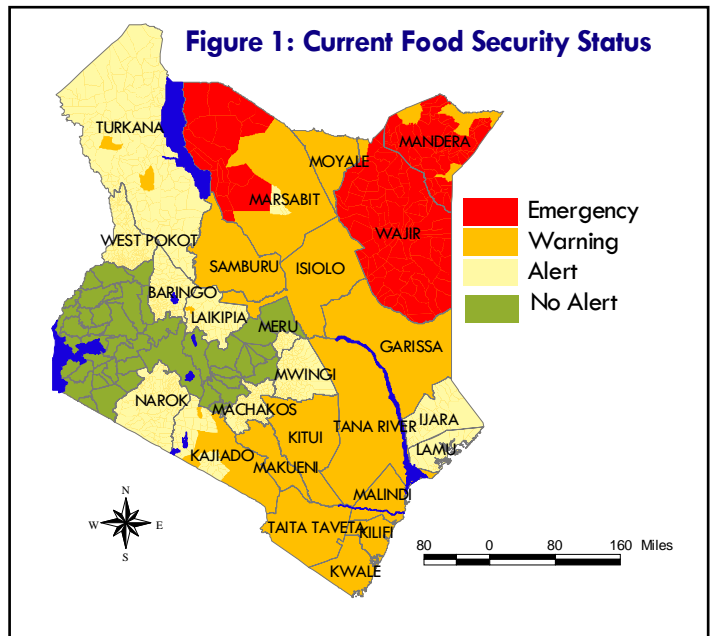
December 19, 2005

Season failure precipitates a crisis among the northern and eastern pastoralists and southeastern farm households

Although food security in most of Kenya is good, following an above average harvest, food insecurity has reached a critical stage in the northern and eastern pastoral districts, following successive seasons of drought. Figure 1 shows the current food security status of areas in Kenya. The Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) projects a significant crisis during the first half of 2006. Poor rainfall in November and most of December has led to the failure of the 2005 short-rains season in the already drought-affected eastern and northern pastoral districts and the southeastern cropping lowlands. In these areas, cumulative rainfall for the season has been less than 30 percent of normal, after a similarly poor 2005 long-rains season.

Significant livestock deaths have occurred due to lack of water, pasture and browse. In addition, weakened animals have succumbed to wet, cold conditions soon after the rains began. Livestock productivity has declined and little or no milk is available to households. As a result, rates of child malnutrition are alarmingly high in parts of the worst-affected districts of Wajir, Mandera and Marsabit. Rates of global acute malnutrition have been surveyed and are between 18-30 percent in these three districts. These rates are well above the World Health Organizations benchmark for a severe situation, or 15 percent global acute malnutrition.

Livestock prices have also declined in December by margins ranging 5 percent for the small stock and 5-10 percent for the large stock. Livestock prices are expected to decline even further during the dry season ahead (January – March). Pastoralists are unwilling to re-stock, due to uncertainty about the weather, while traders have avoided purchasing weakened animals, further accentuating the declining terms-of-trade for pastoralists.



Food insecurity is also expected to worsen in the short-rains dependent southeastern lowlands after three successive failed seasons. Crop output is expected to be less than 30 percent of normal in a region where the short rains crop contributes up to 70 percent of total annual income. Failure of additional rains in January could precipitate a serious food security crisis.

The need for emergency food aid is expected to expand from current caseload of 1.14 million. The geographic distribution and level of food insecurity, as illustrated on the map, may also expand and worsen in the coming months, especially if December and January remain dry. While WFP is currently providing assistance to beneficiaries across these areas, the numbers of people in need of food-aid assistance will grow as households fail to cope with the impact of drought.

Responses to the situation are already underway. The Government of Kenya and its partners are planning a food security assessment of 22 drought-affected districts in January 2006. Because the results of the assessment will not be released until mid-February, the KFSSG decided to release an alert to prompt the Government of Kenya (GoK) and donors to take immediate action and allow sufficient time to mobilize resources to mitigate the affects of drought and save lives and livelihoods. The GoK has donated an additional 10,000 MT of maize to the WFP Emergency Operation (EMOP) and initiated a \$1.3 million livestock off-take program in pastoral districts. The ALRMP has also intensified

water tankering to communities that are facing severe water shortages in the pastoral areas. Many of these measures will need to be expanded should the dry season persist through January. The onset of the long-rains season in March should ease availability of pasture, water and browse.

Projected increases in beneficiary numbers combined with limited donor pledges and a food-aid pipeline that is expected to be exhausted in February 2006 require immediate action by the Government of Kenya, WFP and donors to avoid the loss of lives and livelihood assets. The food aid pipeline is sufficient up to February, the end of the current EMOP. Distributions beyond that are doubtful, unless additional resources are provided. Non-food emergency interventions will also be critical in the coming months. Unfortunately, non-food emergency interventions are systematically under funded in Kenya.

Critical Events Timeline

